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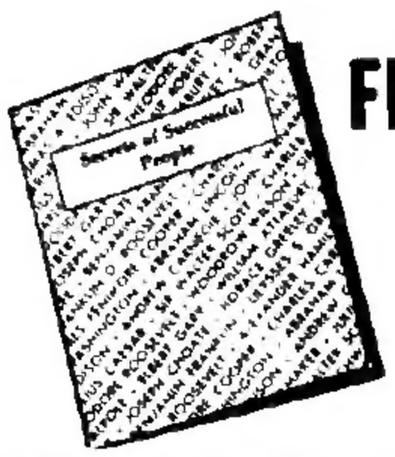

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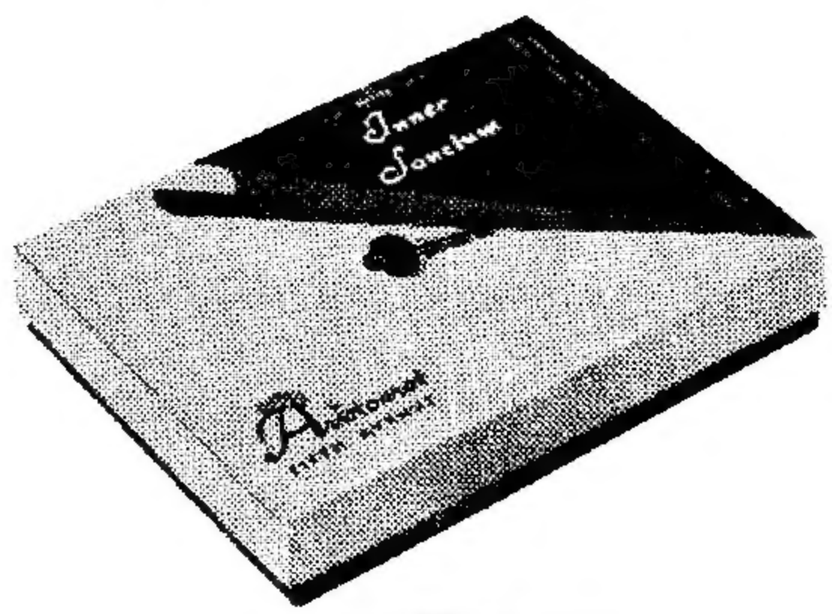

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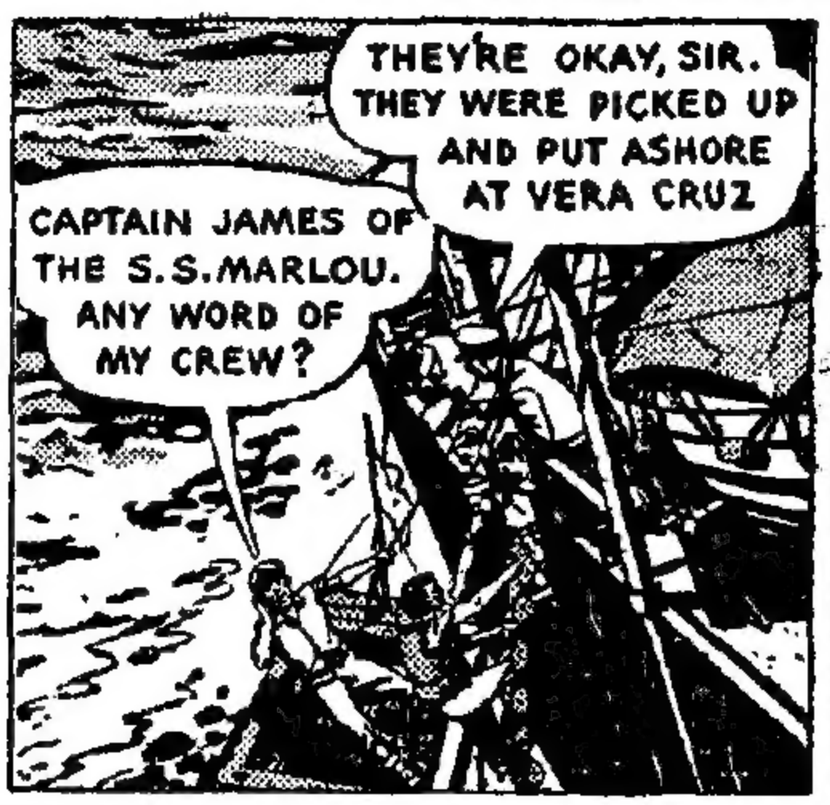

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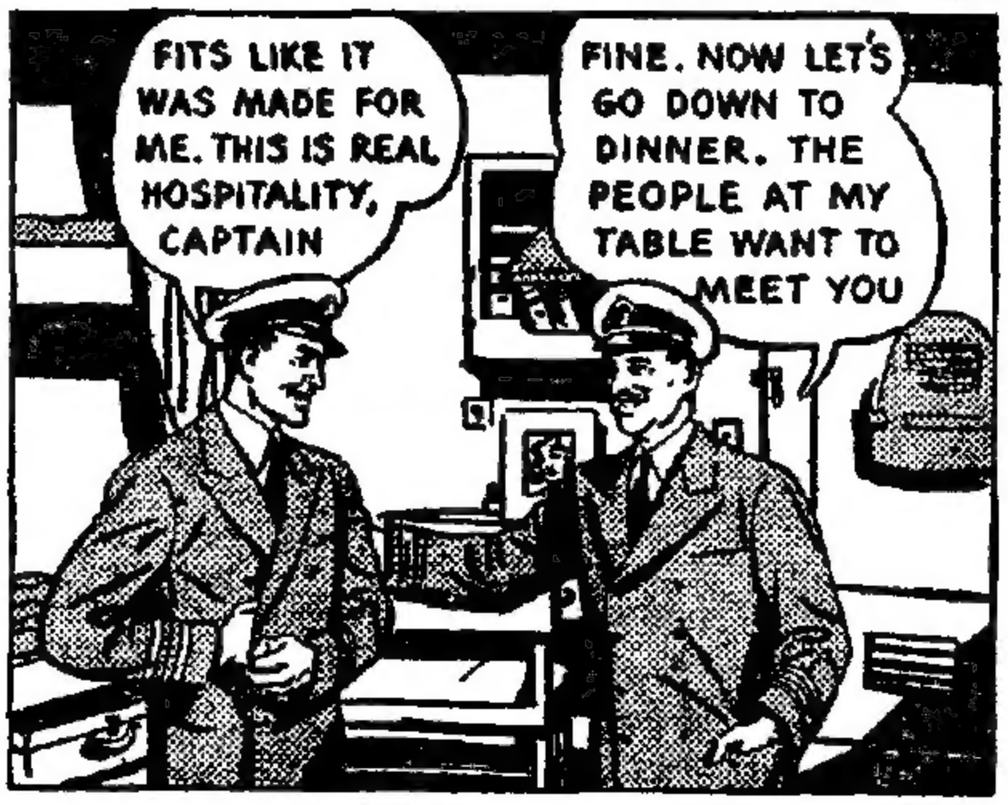
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VOL. 10 AUGUST, 1949 No. 6

Book-Length Novel

The Valley of Silent Men **E. Charles Vivian** 8

It was a nightmare place of devilish beauty—and horror, brooded over by the slow-death poison of a plant that was seeded in hell! And into its silent menace one man must go, to save its self-willed prisoners from its fatal lure. . . .

Short Story

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The bug-eyed monster in the life of ***Unearthly Tales'*** editor was a real-life nuisance—at first. That was bad enough. But when it chased him right into the pages of his own magazine—that was very bad!

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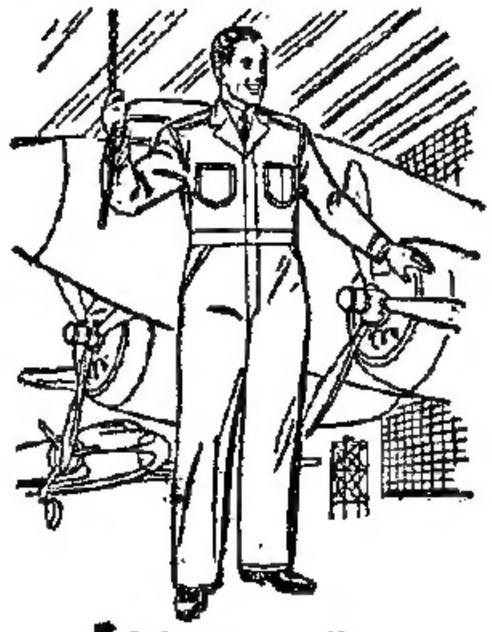

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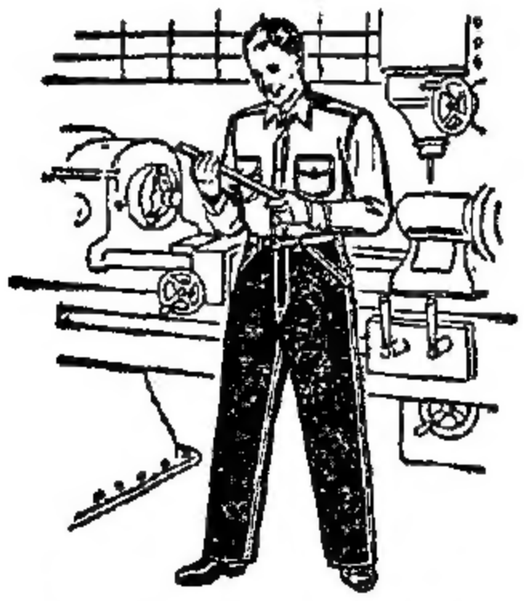

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POPULAR FILMS

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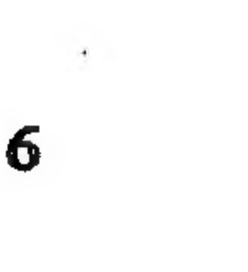
Ted Palmer Picks:

For Comedy-Romance: "The Beautiful Blonde from Bashful Bend" with Betty Grable, Cesar Romero, Rudy Vallee and Olga San Juan (20th Century-Fox). Technicolor.

Beautiful, blonde, gun-happy Freddie Jones (Betty Grable) gets out of town fast after accidentally shooting the Honorable Judge Alfalfa O'Toole in the seat of his pants. Fleeing on a train, she is mistaken by the conductor for "little Hilda Swandumper from Bashful Bend" on her way to teach at Snake City. This is good enough for Freddie—only she knows nothing about school teaching. Charlie Hingelman (Rudy Vallee), under her charms, gives her a few lessons in teaching at night. Freddie's past, however, in the form of Blackie (Cesar Romero), catches up with her. Through a succession of hilarious events, the town is set afeudin', and Freddie gets taken back for trial. She almost goes free when Blackie offers to marry her, but Freddie finishes that by shooting at the judge again. Where and when? Why, in the end, of course. *Good spoofing with lots of broad laughs.*

• • •

For Adventure—"Illegal Entry" with Howard Duff, Marta Toren and George Brent (Universal).



To assist Immigration Inspector Dan Collins (George Brent) break up a gang that smuggles aliens across the Mexican border by plane, Burt Powers (Howard Duff) gets hired by the gang as a pilot. Lucky for him that Anna Duvak (Marta Toren)—an unwilling gang member—tips him off on a trap to test his loyalty. Otherwise, he wouldn't be able to break the gang up and get the girl. *A semi-documentary with good, fast action.*

For Murder Mystery—"Manhandled" with Dorothy Lamour, Sterling Hayden, and Dan Duryea (Paramount).

A hard-pressed author, worried about a recurrent nightmare in which he kills his wife for her jewelry, visits a psychiatrist to get things off his chest. The psychiatrist's secretary, Merl Kramer (Dorothy Lamour), mentions this dream to Karl Benson (Dan Duryea), a private investigator, and a chain of events are set off which lead to murder of the wife, theft of the jewels and some of the dirtiest double-dealing you've seen in some time. Sterling Hayden is the insurance investigator who works on the case. *A film, well-played for suspense, with a neat, ironical wind-up.*

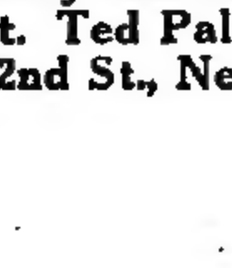
• • •

For Sports—"The Stratton Story" with James Stewart and June Allyson (MGM).

One of the pluckiest stories in sports is retold in this film version of the life of Monty Stratton—brilliant young Chicago White Sox pitcher who lost his leg in a hunting accident after the 1938 major league season. Overcoming this handicap, Stratton learned to use an artificial leg, and in 1946 pitching in the East Texas League, he won 18 games. Although Hollywood over-sentimentalizes the story, this remains a good baseball picture. Jimmy Stewart plays Stratton, June Allyson, his wife, while Gene Bearden, Jimmy Dykes, Bill Dickey and Mervyn Shea lend authenticity to baseball sequences. *It makes a pleasant evening.*

• • •

For A Western—"The Younger Brothers" with Wayne Morris and Janis Page (Warners). Technicolor.



The four Younger brothers, who were once the "Dead End" kids of the West, along with Jesse James and his gang, find it's tough to go straight herein. A vindictive police officer, leading a misguided posse, and a beautiful, female outlaw leader both try to get the boys in trouble. Some good straight-shooting, hard riding and quick thinking save the day. *It has all you want in a Western.*

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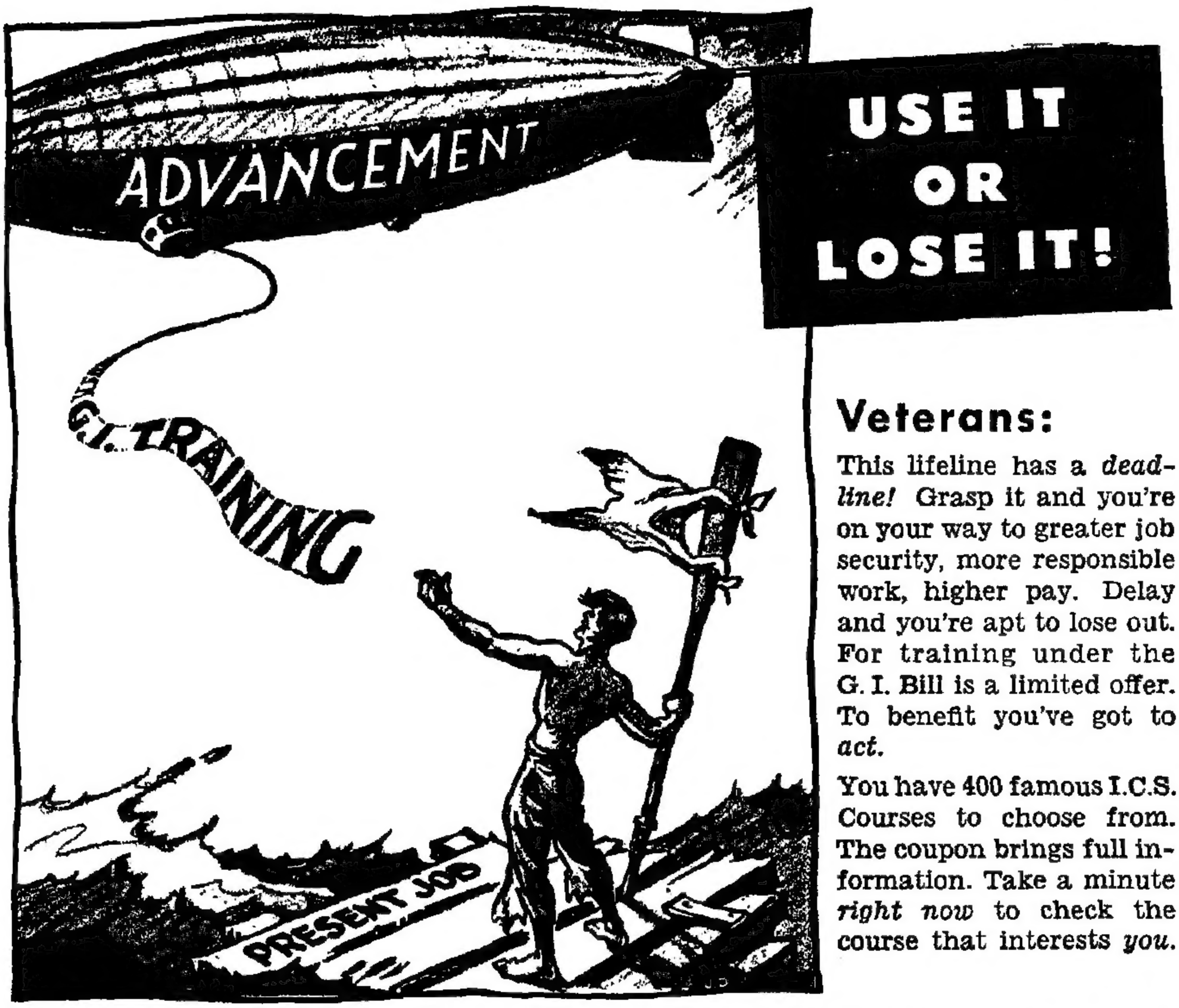

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THE VALLEY OF SILENT MEN

It was a nightmare place of devilish beauty—and horror, brooded over by the slow-death poison of a plant that was seeded in hell! And into its silent menace one man must go, to save its self-willed prisoners from its fatal lure. . . .

CHAPTER I

OVERTURE TO ADVENTURE

THE warmth of the room, obviously one in a private suite, was in keeping with its ostentatious magnificence: both were oppressive. Marshall, coming in from the chill of a late November afternoon, flung back his sleet-moistened overcoat, which had been none too much protection against the temperature of London streets. A tall girl stood to face him—she struck him as more than tall, at a first glance; then he got the quality of her grey eyes, and the soft, deep note of her voice.

"Mr. Victor Marshall?" she asked, supplementing the hotel page's announcement by the Christian name.

Mr. Marshall bowed assent. "With regard to your advertisement—my letter," he answered.

"My step-mother, Madame Delarey, put the advertisement in," the girl corrected. "She will be here in a minute." She looked past him. "This is Mr. Victor Marshall." she ended.

He swung round to face a little, faded-looking old lady who stood just within the room, leaning on a heavy ebony stick. She was small and white-haired and very wrinkled, and the hands on the stick were gnarled and ill-kept, as those of one who works always; the magnificence of the rings she wore was incongruous with her hands, as was she with this garish hotel sitting-room. She peered at Marshall for long seconds, and then came forward, seating herself stiffly on the very edge of one of the plush-covered chairs, as if she feared to disturb the fabric.

"You will sit down—yes? When you have remove your coat, Mr. Victor Marshall."

"Thank you—the coat doesn't matter," he answered, seating himself so as to face her.

"This — my daughter Stephanie — she know," Madame Delarey explained, accounting for the girl's presence. The girl herself made a little gesture of dissent, but did not speak. Marshall merely bowed his head assentingly.

"I advertise for a man, young, resourceful, strong, who know the languages of Malay. You answer—you?"

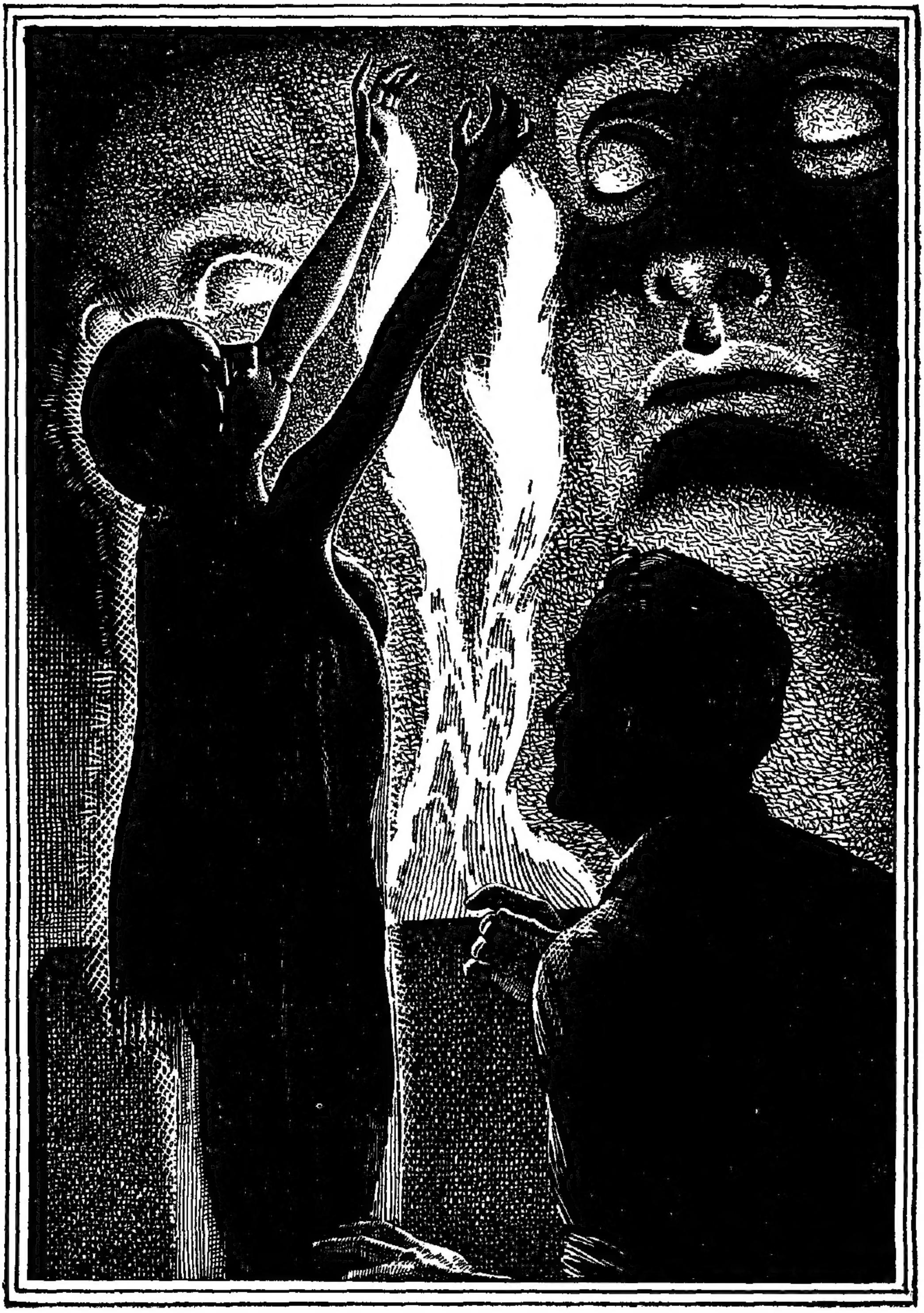
"I answered," Marshall said. "I don't know what you want of the man, but—well, I answered."

Stephanie Delarey, as Marshall judged her name to be, went and sat down by the window, looking out into the street. Her manner was that of one who had heard all before, and thus was little interested.

"I pick out your letter, for you say little —there were many letters," Madame Delarey pursued. "Now I see you, I think I pick right. Two men come here before you to-day, and they go away. I do not like them. I am Frainch, Mr. Victor Marshall, and quick, vairy quick, to like or not to like. You, I like."

The flame reared to the level of her arms from the surface of the stone. . . .

By E. Charles Vivian



Marshall waited. Then: "What is the service—what is it that you want of your man?" he asked.

"You listen, I tell," said the little old lady. "It is what you call a story, and all that story I must tell. You listen—yes?"

"Certainly," Marshall answered, gravely.

"Bon! Then I tell you my story, and you see if you laik my proposal. You are not married—no?"

Marshall shook his head, smiling. The little old lady was so misplaced here, bourgeoisie in a salon of utter exclusiveness; she was like a washerwoman at a court drawing-room, and all the magnificence of her jewellery and rustling silks could not make her other than incongruous. It struck him that, uncertainly as she pronounced her English, she knew it well.

"The man I want shall be free, able to go where I want, do what I ask, and he shall be of those who know the islands of the East, and the talk of the islands. You are that man—yes?"

"I am that man," Marshall said. "I gave you my experience of the islands in my letter of application."

"Bon! Then I tell you my tale. You listen."

She settled herself very gingerly on the edge of her chair, as if she feared to sit on it too heavily. Again Marshall smiled; she was so evidently an intruder on the ultra-magnificence of the furnished suite. The girl by the window looked out into the street.

"I 'ave my 'usband, my son Clement, and my daughter Stephanie—this is my daughter Stephanie," said Madame Delarey, indicating the girl by the window, who again made that little gesture indicative of dissent or denial. "My 'usband was a good man, but at business not good—you understand? 'E was *ancien regime*—aristocrat—you understand?"

Marshall bowed rather than nodded. The grace and dignity of the girl Stephanie, so much at variance with the manner and appearance of the little old lady, might be due to her father's stock, he thought.

"One day," Madame Delarey pursued, "my 'usband come to me and 'e say, Annette, there is one month, and I must raise three 'undred thousand francs. Else it is disgrace, and 'ow shall I, a Delarey, be disgrace?' And the month go past, but the money do not come. My 'usband write to 'is brother Armand, and Armand write back to say that since my 'usband disgrace 'is people by marrying me, 'e shall lie on the bed 'e made. And when that month is ended, my 'usband shoot 'imself, and I am widow."

It was stated quietly, unemotionally; Marshall looked across at the girl Stephanie, but she sat with her face averted, gazing out into the sleet-swept London street. The little old lady plucked thoughtfully at her rich black silk, and then smoothed it down carefully.

"I send for Stephanie from her convent school, and for Clement my dear son from 'is school, and Armand my 'usband's brother come to me with tears in 'is eyes. I tell 'im no tears can give me back my 'usband, and I spit on 'im. So 'e go away.

"After the burying, when it come time for my dear son Clement to go back to school, 'e come to me and put 'is 'ands on my shoulders, and 'e say it is not fit that 'e go back to school to waste more time. 'E is then nearly nineteen years old. 'E say, 'I will work till all the money is paid, and my father's name is once more a name of honour. 'E could not pay, so 'e die as a Delarey should die, but for me it is to restore 'is name.' So with my blessing 'e go out to Pierre Delarey, 'is cousin in Sapelung. For my 'usband 'ave two brothers, Armand who would not 'elp and I spit on, and Jean, who die and leave 'is business to 'is son Pierre, 'is son in Sapelung. And I bid good-bye to Clement when 'e sail for Batavia, six years ago, and against my wish 'e take an oath to the Blessed Virgin that 'e will not come back till the last sou of the three 'undred thousand francs is paid."

She paused in her recital The girl Stephanie stirred restlessly and settled to immobility again. Marshall felt the airless heat of the room as utterly oppressive, and wondered whither this strange story was tending.

"THAT was six years ago," the little old lady went on. "For two years Clement write to me from Sapelung, and say 'ow Pierre was good to 'elp 'im, and altogether 'e send me five thousand francs, which I pay to my 'usband's creditors. Then one day come a letter. Armand, my 'usband's brother, die, and leave to my dear son Clement six million francs, 'to atone,' as 'e say, in 'is will that leave the money. But I do not even forgive 'im dead, for it would 'ave been so easy to save my 'usband when 'e ask. Six million francs, of which the notaries say I 'old in trust for my dear son, and so I write to Clement, but no word come back. I write to Pierre, and 'e write that Clement went with

American man, 'e think, shooting, and from that day I 'ave no word of my dear son. I 'ear no word, and 'e is all I 'ave, my Clement."

The girl Stephanie rose, went to a japanned dispatch box, and took thence a photograph which she gave to Marshall. "That is my step-brother," she said. She appeared not to notice the implied slight in the old lady's last words. Perhaps she had grown used to it.

"You understand?" Madame Delarey pursued. "There is no need for 'im to stay away, if 'e only knew. Pierre say 'e cannot trace Clement, and no more word come to me, so I advertise, three years ago. I send two men out to Batavia and on to Pierre at Sapelung, to go on to find my dear son. What names were they, Stephanie?"

"Henry Benson and Jean Pernaud," the girl answered. It seemed to Marshall that the story was so familiar as to have lost all interest for her.

"Yes," Madame Delarey said, "Benson and Pernaud. To each of these I pay the passage to Batavia and on to Sapelung, and to each I give five 'undred pounds, with the promise of five 'undred pounds each if they bring back my dear son. And I write to Pierre, and tell 'im. The man Pernaud die at Sapelung, and Benson 'e go pearl fishing— So Pierre write to tell me. That was two passages and one thousand pound—for nothing! Then another year I advertise again, and a man with a funny name, Erasmus Whauple, I pick 'im to go. I give 'im five 'undred pounds, and I promise other five 'undred if 'e bring back my dear son, and 'e go. Beyond Sapelung 'e go, to where they grow rubber and there is country not yet fit for growing, and once 'e write back to me that Clement is gone to the valley of silent men. I sent the letter to Pierre, and ask 'im, and 'e write back to say that Erasmus Whauple, when 'e say the valley of silent men, mean death. 'E know no other meaning of 'silent men' so 'e say when 'e write back to me. And from Erasmus Whauple come back no more word to me—'e is lost, like my dear son. So again I advertise, and of all men who answer I tell you this story, and see if you go."

Marshall considered it silently. Already he knew that he would go, but there was more to learn, first. This was but a bare outline.

"Pierre Delarey—you know him well?" he asked at last.

Madame Delarey shook her head. "I 'ave not seen 'im," she answered, in a frightened way, as if this cross-questioning were unexpected. "My 'usband was 'is father's elder brother, and Jean Delarey was agent in Sapelung before I was married—I 'ave not seen 'im too, ever."

"Why are you, French, in England?" Marshall queried, abruptly.

"Armand Delarey 'ave English estates—I cannot sell—I 'old in trust for my dear son," the little old lady answered.

Again Marshall reflected. Clement, not his mother, was beneficiary; he might be merely lost, and again there might be those who would benefit by his disappearance.

"If—forgive me—if your son were proved dead, who is the next heir?" he asked next.

"To Stephanie, 'ere, two million francs, and to Pierre Delarey four million francs," Madame Delarey answered unhesitatingly. "But my dear son is not dead—it is just that 'e is somewhere so 'e do not know, and do not earn money to send as at first."

It was hope against hope, rather than belief, that spoke. The probabilities were strongly against such a conclusion.

"No, of course not," Marshall said, gently.

Madame Delarey looked at him earnestly, searchingly. "Mr. Victor Marshall," she said, and her tone was almost timid, "you are young man, strong, of course—you will go for me and try to find my dear son?"

"I will go," Marshall answered, slowly. "You can book my passage and give me five hundred pounds, like the others, and I will sign any agreement you like, within reason, for a year's service. If possible, I will bring him back."

"'E is all I 'ave," Madame Delarey said, and her lip quivered. "All I 'ave."

"But," Marshall said, speaking more slowly still, "you shall not tell Pierre Delarey one word of me, nor give him any hint that any man is following the others you sent."

She gazed hard at him. "You think—?" she asked.

"Nothing," Marshall said, "for I have nothing to think—no cause to think. But if Pierre Delarey is to be told my errand, I will tell him myself."

"Then you will go?" she asked, eagerly.

"I will go—when you like," Marshall answered.

The little old lady rose from her chair. "You shall 'ear from me to-morrow, Mr. Victor Marshall," she promised. "I will tell my notary—solicitor, you call 'im, and you shall 'ear."

Marshall shook hands with her, bowed

to the girl who had risen and stood silent by the window, and went out.

GOING down the stairs from Madame Delarey's suite to the carpeted, settee-spotted entrance hall of the great hotel, Marshall buttoned his coat, for, though the revolving door kept from him the full chill of the outer air, there was great difference between the normal temperature of the place and Madame Delarey's apartments.

"Childe Roland up to date," he murmured to himself as he went, "and what a dark tower!"

"Mr. Marshall?" The words came at him as he reached the last stair—Stephanie Delarey's voice. The thick pile of the carpet had permitted of her coming to him inaudibly; he turned and stood facing her, waiting.

"You will go—you will take up this search for Clement?" she asked; he saw that she looked fluttered, nervous, almost fearful—far different from the immobile being who had sat by the window while he talked with Madame Delarey.

"I will go," he answered. "I told your—I told Madame Delarey I would go."

She noted his faint annoyance, realized that it was to him as if she had questioned his word with regard to going. She looked to him somewhere in the early twenties, slight, tall, and—he would have said—daintily formed, but most of all he noted her agitation, nervousness.

She leaned toward him ever so little. "Will you take me with you?" she asked.

A pistol fired by his ear would not have startled him more than that abrupt request. "No," he answered promptly. "Why?"

Stephanie Delarey stood thoughtful; flung back on realities by the bald denial and equally bald query, she knew that the refusal had been inevitable, and blamed herself for the lack of tact that had led her to make such a request without preface, without explanation. But, at times, the little old lady whom she had just left drove her to ruthless expedients.

"Unless you are in a hurry, I will tell you why," she answered.

"Your mother—won't she need you?" he asked.

"She is not my mother, and for the present she will not need me," Stephanie answered. "Let us sit down—here."

She led the way to one of the plush settees, and took a corner, smiling up at Marshall and inviting him to a seat by patting the cushion. The trepidant nervousness of the first minute had passed, and now, assessing him more coolly, she saw him as a personable man, exceptionally attractive by reason of the strength his face showed—and she liked his grey eyes. But she saw him more as a means to a possible end than as a man, and calculated her smile in exact proportion to the impression she wished to create in his mind.

"So she is not your mother?" Marshall suggested.

"My father married twice," Stephanie told him. "I was three months old when my mother died. Clement is my half-brother. For me, there were two beings, God and my father, both past questioning. I loved him, and in my sight he could do no wrong. It was his blood in the boy Clement, his fine sense, that sent him to Pierre at Sapelung instead of back to school. Little as I like Clement—"

"So?" Marshall said thoughtfully, not realizing that he interrupted her explanation.

"I want to be just!" she exclaimed, with almost fierce insistence. She felt that she must convince him of her utter sincerity, and he might yet reverse that initial refusal. For him, seen once, she cared nothing—for the chance of escape from her present life, everything.

"I think you would be, anyhow," he commented.

"Here—as I live now—it is not easy," she went on. "I, my father's daughter, am that woman's servant. I am bi-lingual, capable, penniless, dependent on her for everything—you know how difficult it would be to break away—for a girl—"

Marshall began to understand. "Worse than difficult," he agreed.

"And"—she felt it almost impossible to make real to him the hatefulness of her position, dependent on a woman whom she disliked—"you see why I want to escape? Oh, I have tried, again and again, and come to the conclusion that there is nothing but the streets. I am"—she laughed, nervously—"too attractive. They will not take me seriously. And I am a Delarey—she was a factory girl!"

There was something either magnificent or absurd in that claim—"I am a Delarey." With the quickness of intuition she saw its effect on him. "We are antithetical," she went on, before he could comment, "and life with her is not life. I have tried to get away—"

She felt that she had put her case badly—it was just another failure. Later, when she could look back and assess the

matter coolly, she saw how impossible the thing she asked must have seemed to him, with only that little explanation to justify it.

"And so," she ended, "I want you to take me with you."

"No," he said again. "Consider it—I came in answer to your—to Madame Delarey's advertisement, and accepted a business proposal. It entails heaven knows what in the wilds—one man has got lost on it already, and to burden myself with a woman at the outset—I put this frankly as you have put your request to me. How could you come—sister, fiancée, wife—"

Suddenly she saw him as man, rather than as a means to an end. "I have not explained all," she said, hastily. "I wouldn't have you think of me as imposing—"

Marshall smiled. "I'm intensely sorry I see no way of helping you, that's all," he said.

"But—it is difficult to explain it all," she insisted. "Listen—if Clement had been living, she would have heard, she would have had word from him. Since he is dead, when there is proof of his death I shall inherit two million francs. You go to get that proof—when you have got it and so have made my inheritance mine, I will pay you to take me, as she pays you to go. It is that I may get away—this life is unbearable—you understand?"

"Fully," he answered, "but—"

"When I asked you, without explaining first, I did not consider the personal side. I—"

She paused, leaving him to guess what she would have said.

"It cannot be done," Marshall answered. "Even if I could finance the two of us on those lines, which I can't, still it couldn't be done. I don't see—you don't know where a hunt like this may lead—I don't know myself, till I get there."

She sat silent, and from the quality of the silence he could sense her disappointment.

"Look here," he went on. "We're talking pretty frankly, for a first meeting. I'll make a suggestion, if you'll listen. It's a gamble, I know, but you might like to try it. I gather I shall be sailing for Batavia in about a fortnight."

Stephanie nodded. "In about that time," she agreed.

"Supposing you sold all the jewelery you have, raked up every penny possible, how much money could you lay hands on—of your own?" he asked bluntly.

She looked up at him, and down to calculate. "About three hundred pounds, I think," she answered.

"Not nearly enough to finance you out with me, in a suitable way," he commented, "but enough to last you a year in this country, going carefully. Now, as you said, I reckon that if I succeed on this search of mine, I shall come back with news of Clement's death. He'd not have kept silent so long if he had been living."

"He would not have kept silent," she agreed, speaking slowly. It was not of Clement that she was thinking, but of what might lie at the end of this train of postulates.

"And," Marshall went on, "if Clement Delarey is proved dead, you get your two million francs under your uncle's will?"

"That is so," she agreed.

"Then I suggest"—he paused to find words to clothe the suggestion—"that I find you a home for the time I'm away, of some sort that will let your three hundred pounds keep you for the year. I have a sister who would like you, and you might like her—it's easy to get you a little circle of friends and interests, through her. I suggest that you and I go through the ceremony of marriage before I go to hunt for your half-brother—the ceremony only—and when I come back with word of Clement Delarey's death you give me one fourth of your two million francs, and we get the marriage annulled. It won't be divorce, in all probability—only annulment. That is a way out for you."

She thought for a little time. "You may wish for other ties—regret it," she suggested.

"I believe that one woman is just as good as another, and as bad," he reported, cynically. "I've never fallen in love yet, and never shall. This is a business deal, to help you out."

"It is very generous," she said, "very good of you, Mr. Marshall, but I cannot accept it. I would have gone with you—"

"No," he said firmly, for the third time.

"Then"—she rose—"I shall see you again, when you come to settle with Madame Delarey about going out. I—I thank you for your offer, Mr. Marshall—good-bye."

WALKING through the slush of the streets, Marshall smiled to himself. Adventurer from boyhood, he had never stumbled on such an adventure as this promised to be, and he felt glad that he had been free to embark on it. His thoughts reverted to Stephanie; the unthinking impulsiveness behind that "take me with

you" was almost incredible, yet he could understand it. He pictured years of petty irritations, the girl's whole life reversed from the time of her father's death, and now an unreasoning impulse to seize on anything, any way out. Yet she had refused a far more reasonable way: assuming, as she might safely assume, that her half-brother was dead, a safer, easier way—

Stephanie Delarey went slowly back up the carpeted stairway, and as she went—"'One woman is just as god as another, and as bad,'" she quoted to herself. "It is not true—clever, but not true."

She entered the room in which the little old lady had interviewed Marshall.

"Why are you so long away, girl?" her step-mother asked, querulously, with a vindictive look at her.

"There are no letters—I stayed for awhile in the cool," Stephanie answered.

"Do not be impertinent—I will not 'ave your superiority—your insolence!" Madame Delarey announced, loudly.

Stephanie went to the window, making no answer.

"Why do you not speak—can you not speak?" Madame demanded. "This Marshall—'e is a good man—yes?"

"He is a man," Stephanie agreed, listlessly.

"'E will bring my dear son back—I feel 'e will succeed—not like the others. 'E is not like them."

"Perhaps," Stephanie said, with faint interest. The heat of the room oppressed her.

"Ah!" said the little old lady, vindictively. "You think of the two million francs for yourself if Clement die—you wicked girl!" Growing furious, she lapsed to her native tongue—"You have no heart, no affection—you are hateful, and the very bread you eat is at my expense! Clement shall judge your ingratitude, dependent as you are, when he comes—"

She paused to take breath, and then, staring at the closed door beyond which Stephanie had passed, called—

"Come back—come back—I need you!"

But, for almost the first time in their ill-assorted relationship to each other, Stephanie did not come back. She had gone to think things over, out of hearing of that nagging, persistent voice.

Three days later Marshall was ushered into the presence of the little old lady—he came in answer to a letter which enclosed voluminous instructions and information drawn out by a firm of solicitors, together with an agreement—he had already signed it—binding him to a year's undivided service in quest of Clement Delarey, dating from the sailing of the *S. S. Sanjredim* a fortnight hence. Stephanie bowed to him as he entered—coolly, he thought. In reality she was trepidant, not cool.

"Mr. Victor Marshall, 'ere in this envelope is your passage ticket, with return," the little old lady said, without preface, placing her heavily jewelled fingers on the papers before her, "and 'ere is five 'undred pound bank notes. You 'ave the full instructions I tell the notary to send to you?"

"Yes," he answered. "Here is your agreement—signed. I suppose you know it is waste paper when I reach Sapelung—quite useless?"

"I do not know," she answered. "It is form—the notary 'e will 'ave it so, and I do not mind. You 'ave said you will go—I trust you, Mr. Victor Marshall."

The reiteration of the full name annoyed him vaguely. "I will do my best," he promised.

"Then that is all." She stood up and held out her hand to him. "Bon voyage, and you take my prayers for success. You must bring 'im back to me—'e is all I 'ave."

"I will do my best," he repeated.

He paused at the foot of the stair on his way out, and there again Stephanie overtook him, as on his first visit. "I feared to miss you," she said, rather breathlessly.

"Well, you haven't," he answered, smiling.

"I wish"—she hesitated nervously—"to accept your proposal, since you will not take me with you."

Marshall stood silent for what seemed to her a long time. "To accept," he repeated at last.

She held out an envelope toward him. "I have written it all down here—the half-million francs, the promise to annul—all, and signed it. If you will arrange, and let me know, I will be ready when you wish."

"I'm not sure—" he began thoughtfully.

"No—don't humiliate me so far—don't refuse!" she broke in. "Don't you see—it's not easy to say—I am driven—" She paused, inarticulate, almost desperate.

"My dear lady, I never dreamed of refusing," Marshall assured her. "A reasonable prospect of half a million francs in return for a mere formality is too good a chance to refuse. I'm not sure about

the arrangements, that's all. As quickly as I can I'll make them, and I'll write and let you know, shall I?"

His matter-of-fact air restored her calm. "Thank you," she said. "I shall be ready at any time. But—it is not easy—will you make it as easy as you can for me?"

"I'll be consideration itself," he promised, smiling. "Regard it as what it is, a formal business deal, and you'll find it isn't very difficult. Look at it in that light."

She smiled back at him. "I am grateful," she said, holding out her hand. "Will you forgive me—I must go back, now."

"Then—*au revoir*, and I will write to tell you when," he said, and let her go.

She had come down to him fearful, dreading refusal. She went back smiling, almost happy, seeing a way out from the life she hated. And, as Marshall had bidden, she regarded it as a formal business deal.

IT WANTED four days of Marshall's date of sailing when, having taken her morning cup of chocolate to Madame Delarey (which the fractious old lady would never allow a servant to bring into the room, since she had not put in her false teeth at that early hour), Stephanie rang the bell for the hall porter. She indicated a small trunk and a large suit case in her own room—

"A taxi for Charing Cross station, and put these on it, please," she said. "I shall be down in a minute.

When he had gone, she put on her coat and hat, collected a few personal belongings for which she had reserved an attache case, and went down to the waiting taxi. At Charing Cross she saw her baggage safely into the cloak-room, and the next hour she spent shrunk into a corner of the chilly waiting-room. Marshall had appointed eleven o'clock for their meeting, but she had had to leave the hotel before Madame rose and made her toilet; this meant a full hour in the waiting room, a time of deadly fear lest somebody should track her out, take her back, and deliver her up to the terrible old woman from whom she was about to escape, with Marshall's help. Viewing her situation sanely, she knew full well that nobody had the power to take her thus, but yet there was the feeling, due to the years of subservience which her step-mother had imposed on her; it was an unreasoning fear, but not less real for that, and she felt that the time of waiting would never pass.

But nobody came to trouble her, until Marshall himself stood before her.

"Have you been waiting long?" he asked, by way of greeting.

"Fear made it seem long," she answered, smiling as she rose, "but it is all right, now. Where do we go first?"

"Registrar's," he answered. "The first thing is to alter your surname, so that everything's legal and straight. I gave your age as twenty-four—was that right?"

"A good guess," she answered, "only a year short of reality. And the other particulars?"

"Near enough—there's nobody to question. There'll be no informalities—unfortunately for you, it must be binding."

"Not more unfortunately for me than for you," she said, with some asperity. "It couldn't be a change for the worse."

"Thank you," Marshall said drily. He put up a hand for a taxi in the station yard.

Inside the taxi, she laid her hand on his arm. "Please, I am grateful to you, really," she said. "But you say things which sound so bitter—I can't help retorting."

"Well," he answered, reflectively, "you won't hear them much longer. As a matter of fact, it's I who ought to be grateful to you, really. A chance of half-a-million francs for a mere day of formalities—with a very charming companion to share them—is some cause for gratitude, you know."

There was a hint of satiric amusement in his way of uttering the compliment, and Stephanie made no answer. She felt that she almost hated him for this coolness, this utter disregard for all but the business deal involved in the adventure; she had yet to realize that he adopted the only attitude such a situation would admit.

She was never able, after, to determine the location of that registry office. She retained a memory of passing St. Pancras station, and another memory of spoken words, shabby witnesses signing, somebody speaking a formal and unmeaning phrase of congratulation, and of emerging to the cold of the winter day and finding the taxi driver stamping back and forth to warm himself.

"An' a fine pair you make, sir, if I may say so," he told Marshall, as he held the door of the cab open.

"My good man," Marshall said, "every couple is not a pair, as you ought to know. Make for Gennaro's."

At the little restaurant, where they

seemed to know him very well, a secluded corner table was reserved. Marshall consulted Stephanie as to her taste in wine, ordered lunch with discrimination, and eyed the initial cocktails approvingly. He took up his glass—

"Mrs. Marshall," he said, lightly, "I'm glad to have the honour of drinking your health on this auspicious occasion—" He put the glass down again, suddenly.

"Why, child, what on earth's the matter?"

For, instead of responding as he had expected, she pushed her glass away and sobbed, almost noiselessly, till the tears trickled between her fingers in spite of her handkerchief. Marshall got up and stood beside her.

"Go away—I'll call you," he said to the waiter who appeared. "Stephanie—child—I wouldn't hurt you for the world—it's all to help you through—"

Suddenly he realized how much he wanted her through, and in the realization gathered something of the cause of this outbreak. But Stephanie, controlling herself, showed him a wet, smiling face—

"It's all right," she said, "just a fit of nerves. You can't—you wouldn't understand, if I told you."

After a pause he went back to his seat. "Perhaps I do understand," he said, soberly. "Anyhow, I'll drink to your happiness when the real day comes and this muddle is over."

"And I to yours," she answered. "May it reward you for your kindness to me."

Marshall beckoned to the waiter. "Fully paid, don't forget," he reminded her. "A purely business deal."

She let it pass in silence. His insistence on the point might be due to consideration for her, but it was none the less irritating.

"Where do we go next?" she asked, after a silence.

"To my bank, before it closes, to open an account for you," he answered. "You brought your capital with you, I hope?"

"It's not all money," she explained. "Most is jewelery that I want you to sell for me."

"And how do you know I won't bolt with the proceeds of the sale?" he asked.

"If I did not know, I should not be here," she answered, coldly. "I wish you would be yourself—not pretend."

"You'll trust less easily after being deceived a few times," he commented, more seriously. "There's something about you so youthful, inexperienced—as if you had been bottled away somewhere instead of living. You seem too trusting."

"Some people one can always trust—you are one," she answered. "Shall we take that for granted?"

"Consider it done," he agreed. "We'll fix up your account at the bank under your new signature, and then, unless you have any calls to make, there'll be time for tea and a cinema or any other wild dissipation that may appeal to you, before I take you up to my sister and spring the surprise of her life on her."

Stephanie stared at him. "You have not told her?" she asked.

Marshall shook his head and grinned like a schoolboy. "It would have been bad policy," he said. "Confront her with the deed accomplished, and the trick's done. A woman always hates the girl her brother is going to marry, unless she chooses that girl for him. She may like his wife, if she's wise as well as clever—like my sister."

"Is she married herself?" Stephanie asked. For the first time she realized that she knew absolutely nothing about the man before her, nothing about his life and people—

Marshall nodded. "Not so much as her husband is, poor chap," he said. "They live up at Golders Green, and I keep two rooms in the house while I'm in England. I leave it to you to decide whether you retain those two rooms for my time away, or find others. You'd better see my sister first, to judge whether you can stand her."

Stephanie reflected, and shook her head slowly. "It would not be wise," she said, "we shall be better friends in the end if we keep quite apart."

"It doesn't apply," he pointed out. "There is only the matter of my year away—after that, you needn't bother about my sister or about me—you seem to forget that."

"I had forgotten it," she agreed, smiling.

GROWING used to her presence, he felt that he had no great wish for her to remember the temporary nature of their contract. "Well, anyhow, I'll have a talk over things with her before I go, and get her to help you in finding a place for yourself—if you still think of doing so after you've seen her."

"There was one thing, arising out of your bargain with my stepmother," Stephanie said, "that I wanted to remind you of. You insisted that Pierre, at Sapelung, should not know you were going out to search for Clement."

"Well?" he asked. "It may be unnecessary, but on the other hand it may be very necessary. Don't forget that three men

went by way of Pierre, and they have all vanished. It may be coincidence, but—"

She made a little gesture that implied he had misunderstood her intent in speaking. "Not that," she said. "It occurred to me—the solicitors who drew up the agreement—I do not know, but Pierre is joint heir with me, and they may be in communication with him. If they are, I don't see how you can go without his knowing —to Sapelung."

Marshall considered it, silently.

"Thanks," he said at last, "it was good of you to point it out—I had overlooked that possibility. I think I see a way round it, though."

"And—you'll write to me if anything happens?" she asked.

"Not unless?" he asked in turn.

"Why should you?" she countered, quickly.

Marshall looked steadily at her. "Do you happen to have a pocket mirror about you?" he inquired.

"But that," she said, "is foolishness. Besides, it is outside our compact."

"Technically," he agreed, "but it's a bit annoying that a man mayn't—never mind, though."

She did not ask him to complete the sentence. Instead, she looked at him in a rather scared way, as if she feared lest she had merely exchanged one disability for another. He smiled when he saw the look.

"Don't worry," he said. "In four days' time you'll have nothing to worry about."

For the rest of the day he was consideration itself, and he kept her occupied to the exclusion of thought, even resorting to the threatened cinema entertainment. Then he took her up by taxi to Golders Green, and on to the house in Bearnais Road where his sister lived, a smaller and more alert copy of himself. She stared, voicelessly, at sight of the strange girl and her trunk and suit case.

"Stephanie," Marshall said, "this is my sister Elizabeth, always called Bob for short. Bob, I have the honour to introduce my wife."

Bob looked at him as if unwilling rather than unable to believe it of him, but he nodded confirmation. Then she laid her hands on Stephanie's shoulders and kissed her.

"I do not understand," Stephanie said, the tears in her eyes. "Why are you so good to me!"

"Come," Bob said. "I'll show you the way to Victor's room while he gets rid of the cab. You'll soon get used to our little habits. I'm used to his trick of springing surprises, though this is a little bit out of the ordinary, even for him."

She took Stephanie off, and Marshall, after dismissing the cabman, went to inform his brother-in-law in the dining-room of his latest venture.

"What did Bob say?" asked Harry Crawford, Bob's husband.

"Just nothing," Marshall answered. "She seemed to be doing a power of thinking."

Crawford observed, "Bob beats you in some ways, Victor."

Then Stephanie and Bob came back. The four of them had a rather constrained meal together, and, after, Marshall took Stephanie up to his sitting-room.

"Well," he said "you're fixed. I think everything's settled, isn't it?"

She nodded assent. "You have been more than good to me," she answered. "If you knew what it felt like to know that I shall not go back there—to her—"

"Nothing more you want?" Marshall asked.

"Nothing."

She faced him in these new surroundings, smiling, more content and at rest than he had seen her, before. She seemed to take for granted that all would be well, now. Marshall half turned away, and swung back toward her—

"Supposing — supposing — Stephanie—" he said, awkwardly, and hesitated. "If it were real—"

Her smile vanished. She looked at him steadily.

Marshall made a curious gesture, half of negation, half of dismay.

"Good-night, Stephanie." He offered his hand.

Before he could prevent her, she had bent and kissed it.

"You make me ashamed," she said.

Marshall laughed, lightly. "Wait till I claim my half-million," he said, and left her.

"Well?" he asked his sister, down in the dining-room.

Bob laughed. "Give me time to find out," she answered. "I like the first impression."

"You had to say that much," he observed. "Now—look after her, Bob. I've got to leave. I may see you more than once again before I sail, and I may not—there's much to be done."

"You're not leaving her here alone?" she asked, incredulously.

"Just that," he answered, "and it may be of the utmost importance—it may mean

as much as half a million francs to me—that you should be absolutely certain I left her here alone, to-night. Remember that."

She looked her questioning, but did not voice it. Victor was always making mysteries, though this looked by far the most mysterious of any in her experience.

"She'll tell you all about it, probably, if you ask her," he said. "Take care of her—she's a bit unworldly, in some ways. Help her if she needs help"—he looked past her to the clock on the mantel—"good-night, Bob—I'm off."

CHAPTER II

THE WAY TO THE FIELDS OF SLEEP

THE *S. S. SANJREDIM* had a good deal of cargo to discharge at Colombo, and Mr. Victor Marshall, in common with the great majority of the passengers, filled in time by going ashore. He went in company with Mr. Obadiah S. Fetherboom, a very talkative American who was on his way to revolutionise Rangoon—for a start—by means of internal combustion engine pumping sets, lighting sets, haulage sets, and various other sets. Obadiah, who had yet to see Rangoon, guessed it was an unenlightened village, and calculated that a couple of his pumping sets would make a dry ditch of that little creek, the Irrawaddy. Marshall, who thoroughly enjoyed Obadiah, solicited the honour of his company for a look round Colombo, and got it.

The hatches were on again, and there were but twenty minutes to go before the *Sanjredim* should turn her nose seaward, when Obadiah came up the side again, two coolies helping. His panama hat had suffered a three-cornered tear, and his hair stuck through the hole; he had the beginnings of a black eye, and his tussore coat looked as if a vacuum cleaner would be more use on it than a mere clothes brush; a dingy bath towel, tied round his left knee, announced that his trousers had not escaped the cataclysm, but still he stated sonorously and repeatedly that he desired to be taken back to old Kentucky—he had a fine baritone voice—and seemed content to stay on deck without alterations. The purser, in his capacity of universal friend and helper, tried to persuade Obadiah to retire for repairs, and thus was first to learn that if Obadiah were bad, Marshall was worse, for he had not come back at all—this as the *Sanjredim* went out.

He was a son of a snipe and a broken-toothed buzz-saw, a cock-eyed, rubber-necked, misbegotten rum barrel. He had lured Obadiah to a shack in a block down in the never-never district, where they found lovely ladies who offered lovelier bottles with a twist that would make any guy gargle. Obadiah himself had not so much had a drink as been struck by lightning, and Marshall had got stuck up with a fellow who handed out the glad mit and froze to him like a bronco buster to a bottle of old rye. And the fuller they got the thicker they got, till Obadiah got his dander riz because Marshall was too sozzled to think about quitting the picnic before sailing time.

They had a little discussion, and Marshall managed to stop on his feet long enough to sock Obadiah one in the optical apparatus, but he fell down again before Obadiah could sock him one back, and went to sleep. Gabriel's trump wouldn't wake him till he'd slept off some of the bottled earthquake they'd been drinking; Obadiah tried to get a gharry, or a traction engine, or something, but they were in an alley so narrow that a fly couldn't crawl down it sideways, and he had to go nearly half a mile before he found a wooden mouse-trap on wheels. When he came back in that to where he judged he had left Marshall, there were seventeen alleys up which a thin guy would have to go edgeways, and Marshall had blazed no trail. So Obadiah had to come away lest Rangoon should remain uncivilized, and, anyhow, Mr. Marshall was old enough and healthy enough to come in out of the rain without being pulled.

By the time all this story had been told, the *Sanjredim* had got to open sea, minus a passenger. The purser overhauled such belongings as Marshall had left on board, and decided that they were not worth bothering about; apparently, said the purser with some contempt, this was the sort of man who travelled with his toothbrush in his hatband and bought a clean handkerchief once a week, the day he turned his collar. He could apply to the agency of the line at Colombo, or to the police, or to the devil—it was his own fault, anyhow. Obadiah, his elation replaced by deep and dyspeptic gloom, nursed a thunderously black eye and agreed, heartily.

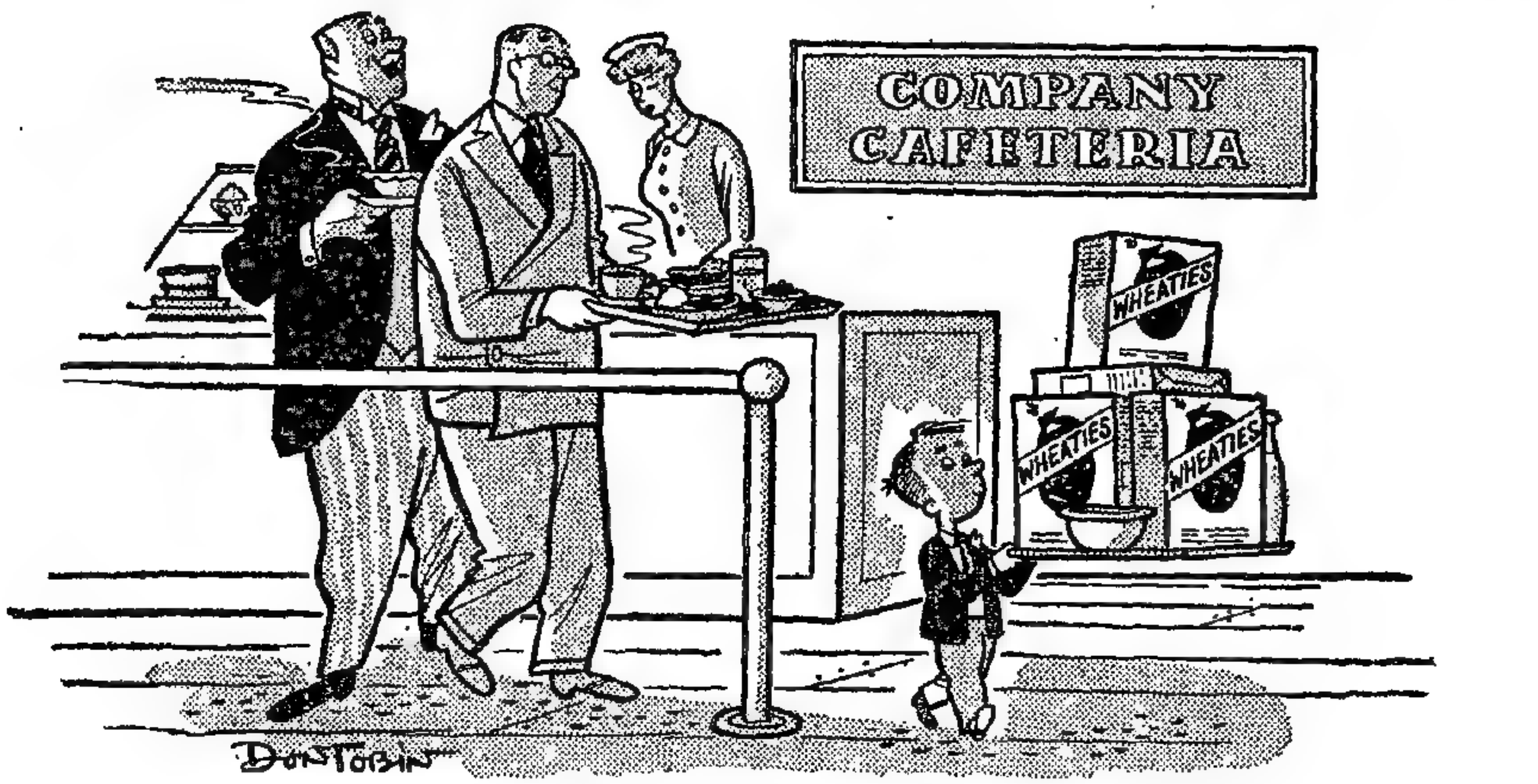
All over the East, from the Straits to the Solomons and down to Viti Levu, Sapelungs abound, differing from each other in size and in the quality of their trade, replacing the Eurasians in the north by ab-

original races in the south, but serving each the same purpose as the rest, and monotonously beautiful—from a distance in fine weather—after two or three have been visited. The navigators of old time, as they touched at each of the islands, found and noted its best natural harbour, and there the chief port of each island has accreted as needs have directed.

Sapelung itself spread round the upper end of an inlet, with Government House nestling white and splendid in the foliage that clothed the first rise of the hills at the back of the port. A solidly built jetty gave accommodation for the fortnightly steamer which brought the mails, and for such tramps and traders as had occasion to visit the place, and the main trading avenue went up, a white and dusty highway of which the refracted glare was almost painful in the dry season, from the end of the jetty toward Government House. To right and left of this avenue, palm-bordered roads extended transversely; to the left, toward the point where the lighthouse stood, were the houses of the few white people of the town, the club buildings, and the inevitable race-course; to the right was the cosmopolitan rather than native quarter, tenanted by de Souzas and Martinezes from Goa, by Ah Lings and Foo Chengs from anywhere between Hankow and Peking, by coolies from the docks, Kanakas, labourers from the rubber plantations, and all the wash and waste of peoples that eddy into and out of the harbours of the East.

Sapelung, with rubber for its chief industry and hopes of an infant sugar-growing enterprise, was no better than the rest of its kind, and no worse; no busier, and no lazier. It was the sign manual of the West set on this fragment of the East, as indication that the hinterland beyond was marked for subjugation. Already the rubber plantations stretched for miles, and the plans were out for a railway, while after-dinner speakers at Government House no longer spoke of the place as an Outpost of Empire, but as One of the Bright Gems which add lustre to the Heritage of Our Race. Put into plain English, this meant that the aborigines—round about Sapelung itself, for the country beyond the first range of hills was still largely unexplored—had forgotten the tastes of long pig, and knew which end of the human frame a pair of trousers was designed to cover, while commercial travellers were more welcome than missionaries.

ON the left of the white highway leading up from the jetty toward Government House, a straggling edifice of wood and plaster bore, in big black letters sprawled across its front, the legend—*Jean Delarey et Fils, Agents.* The vague description covered practically every



"There's a man who's going places in this company."

ANOTHER up-and-coming young man is Boston Braves' Al Dark. Wheaties eater for over 10 years, he was voted "Rookie of the Year" in '48! Famous training dish—these 100% whole wheat flakes, milk and fruit. Real "he-man" nourishment plus second-helping flavor. Had your Wheaties today? "Breakfast of Champions"!

branch of trading; Pierre Delarey, young, dark, almost too alert for this climate, presided over a couple of score of clerks of many colors and languages, and through them he would procure anything from a stamp album to a steam shovel, from a pie dish to a pickaxe. Jean Delarey, his father, had come to Sapelung in the days when one was borne ashore on the shoulders of coolies through the surf, and had contracted for all the material of which the jetty was built.

Pierre, at his death, had come to full ownership of the principal business of its kind in Sapelung, and, since he followed his father's rule of never refusing a commission, Delarey's remained the chief agency of the place. There was a legend to the effect that Pierre Delarey had once, at the request of an eccentric client, indented for a pair of dental forceps for an elephant and submitted blue prints of different patterns, but, since there were no elephants in or near Sapelung, they told this tale to newcomers, and followed it up with a description of the pipe line through which the raw rubber was pumped from the plantations at the back into tank steamers.

As was his custom, Pierre Delarey went down to the jetty to see the mail boat in —the particular mail boat which brought a solitary passenger transferred from the *Sanjredim*, a rubber man back from leave. Pierre took him up to the club, with a view to learning the news of the voyage, and anything else he could.

"We lost a man at Colombo," the rubber man told him, among other things. "Nice, quiet sort of man he seemed—chap named Marshall. Must have been a holy terror when he got loose, though—he took a Yankee ashore to show him round, and when the Yankee came back he looked as if Marshall had stood him on one ear and twirled him."

"What became of Marshall?" Pierre asked, carelessly—almost too carelessly, except that the rubber man could know nothing.

The rubber man shook his head. "Strayed," he answered. "Too drunk to get back—cleaned out and jailed, probably."

Pierre nodded, contentedly. "Funny thing," he said.

"Not a bit," said the rubber man. "I judged him a born beach-comber, after that, though he seemed quiet enough before we got there. Probably he was about three days in advance of a warrant for bigamy, or something."

Pierre, who let the subject drop, haunted the jetty for weeks after, if the smoke of a steamer showed out beyond the point, but no Marshall appeared. But one day there dropped off a tramp from Penang a quiet Englishman who limped slightly—the rubber man had long since gone back to his work—one who moved slowly, as if he were convalescing after illness. His name, Pierre ascertained, was Walker, and he intended to recuperate in Sapelung, and then go up the country at the back, shooting. As he wanted a gun and equipment, he came to Jean Delarey et Fils.

"Any old gun," he explained, "so long as you've got stuff to fit it. I can't afford high prices."

They sold him a rather ancient second-hand breach-loader with one barrel rifled and one for shot, a plain and serviceable gun. They sold him, too, revolver cartridges, and leggings, and meat lozenges, and quinine and simple medicines. Evidently, from the way in which he made his purchases, he was no greenhorn, and Pierre, after a business chat, invited him to lunch at the club; such a man was worth cultivating, in view of possible future business—Pierre never neglected chances.

For a man of French descent, Pierre was very English; he was sympathetically interested in Walker's project of shooting out back from Sapelung, and gently discouraging.

"It is not often done," he said, over the liqueurs. "Possibly half a dozen men have tried it, but—well, Mr. Walker"—in a burst of confidence—"the fact is that there is practically nothing to shoot."

"A slight drawback, certainly," Walker answered, thoughtfully. "Then, I conclude, my predecessors came back disgusted?"

"When they came back—yes," Pierre agreed.

Walker let the implication pass. "What is the country like?" he inquired. "I had heard that there were some good game tracts."

"There were, this side the hills, but they are under rubber, now," Pierre told him. "You must cross inland by the pass, there" —he indicated a wedge-shaped cut in the hills beyond Government House, visible from where they sat—"and then you get lost. There is scrub for a few miles, and then thick jungle, with no paths but wild pig and leopard tracks—"

"Leopards don't make tracks," Walker interrupted gravely, ignoring Pierre's previous statement about the non-existence of game.

"And not all the others came back," Pierre concluded, with thoughtful irrelevance.

"Dead?" Walker asked.

Pierre gestured, non-committal. "How shall we know, here in Sapelung?" he asked. "We are business men—they came here like you, as men of leisure. They may have gone off from some other point along the coast, they may be hunting yet, settled in native villages, lost in jungle—anything. One might search for years, in the country back of the hills, and find nothing at the end."

He seemed anxious to convey an impression, rather than to make a definite statement, to disapprove without showing any desire to influence the man before him.

"Who were these others?" Walker asked pointblank.

"There was a man—a man named Whauple," Pierre answered slowly—perhaps reluctantly. "And there was another man, Pernaud. And—"

He paused on the word. Walker waited vainly for him to continue.

"No," he said at last, "it is not good shooting country."

"Is is interesting?" Walker asked. "I heard it was."

Pierre shook his head. "There are tales," he said, "but here—we grow rubber, hope to grow sugar, buy and sell—we know up to the pass, there. Beyond, there are tales. A volcanic belt—hot springs, they say, and a crater or two, very dusty. Impassable jungle, fever, marsh land, malaria, uncivilized natives—some of them still use poison for tipping their arrows, I believe—"

Again he paused, watching his auditor's face narrowly; the scrutiny told him nothing.

"If you change your mind, I will buy back your outfit," he concluded, with an engaging smile.

"I will let you know if I change my mind," Walker answered.

They sat silent for quite a long time, though the liqueur glasses were empty.

"In any case, you will not go alone," Pierre suggested.

Walker considered it. "I think I shall take a Chink," he answered. "They are cheap, and very good, and they don't sicken easily. A good, cookee washee Chink—"

"I think I can recommend you one or two," Pierre offered.

"Many thanks," Walker said. "It is very good of you—that is, if I don't change my mind."

Pierre, due back at his store, looked at his watch. "If you will excuse me—?" he suggested.

WALKER, with a half-smile on his face, watched this very English Frenchman walk alertly down toward his place of business, from the end of the club verandah. Then he came back, and, sitting down again, looked up at the wedge-shaped cut in the hills through which, if Pierre spoke truly, the man named Whauple had gone—had any other gone that way?

There was a medical missionary, Mackeller by name, at the club, and Walker got into conversation with him. He was merely waiting for a boat from Sapelung, he said, but he had worked in the place when the rubber planting industry was just beginning—that was years before. He remembered how chicken-pox had first come as a scourge; the natives had died like flies, and they said that out at the back, beyond the hills, a white man would be more hunted than hunter still, if he got into the uncivilized areas; such villages as there were in the lowlands had the chicken-pox as a legend of death that the white men carried, and it was odd, in Mackeller's opinion, that Delarey had not mentioned this.

Walker spoke of Pernaud and Whauple; Mackeller had heard of Pernaud, who, it was generally supposed, had died inland. Sapelung was a place of comings and goings, apart from its rubber interests; if a man chose to go inland, they told him what he was up against, and (here the missionary confirmed Pierre) it was nobody's business to go after him, for the nature of the country made search hopeless. Mackeller believed Pernaud had gone looking for somebody else, but knew little about that; Pernaud had first come out to Delarey with another man, Benson, and Benson had gone off to Java in Delarey's employ—he was in Java yet, Mackeller believed, though he was not certain. Then there had been Delarey's young cousin, a boy who had come out and gone off on that ridiculous old story of Mah-Eng.

Here Walker grew very interested. "Who is Mah-Eng?" he asked.

Mackeller smiled. "It is a place, not a person—if it exists," he said. "So far as one can tell, it is a mere legend that has grown up out of lack of knowledge of the native dialects. People misunderstand words and phrases, build up a myth."

"Probably," Walker said, with a note of doubt.

Mackeller smiled. "Mah-Eng is as mythical as Kir-Asa, or any other of the yarns they tell in Pacific ports. It was a fairly common story in the early days, but rubber planting has proved that the further you clear the country inland, the less you find. There is not so much talk about it, now."

"What was the story?" Walker asked.

"They used to say that Mah-Eng was a mine of some sort, I believe, and then there was another belief that it was a temple in the jungle, hidden treasure house, or something of the sort. Then they said it was a a mine the early navigators of these seas had worked, but there is no trace of any such working, and no trace, either, of gold or gems along the hills at the back —no geological indication of anything of mineral value, with the exception of a thin stratum of mica. Mineralogists put that story of Mah-Eng with the squared circle and the sea serpent, and so do I."

"And Delarey's cousin didn't," Walker commented, thoughtfully.

"It seems rather strange," Mackeller said, "that Delarey didn't mention him, when he was telling you of the men who have gone inland. The facts about the boy were enough to call for mention."

"Yes?" Walker asked.

"Yes," Mackeller said. "It was generally known in Sapelung, a month or two after the boy had gone—his name was Delarey, too—that he had inherited millions. Evilly disposed people say that Pierre Delarey is waiting for a full seven years for the time of his cousin's disappearance to elapse, since he can't get proof of his death, and when the time is up he will go to France, or perhaps it is England, and claim the inheritance. He is entitled to it at his cousin's death."

"They say that, do they?" Walker commented.

"It is common knowledge in Sapelung," Mackeller answered.

They talked for a while longer, Walker deeply interested in all that Mackeller had to tell. He gathered, more by manner than through statement, that Mackeller had no great love for Pierre Delarey. Before they parted he asked Mackeller to come and dine with him that evening.

"You've told me a good deal that I wanted to hear from an unprejudiced source," he explained, "and I think I want your advice."

"And," said Mackeller, smiling, "if it agrees with your inclinations, you'll follow it."

Walker smled too. "Anyhow," he said, "if you'll come, I have a tale or two to tell, and Mrs. Martinez—my landlady—is a good cook. It seems that you know more about this place than anyone I've met so far—we can have a talk—"

Mackeller agreed. He had nothing to do but wait for his boat, and out of this first meeting he had acquired a liking for Walker.

MRS. MARTINEZ produced a duck as *pièce de résistance*, and when Walker and Mackeller had laid bare the skeleton the missionary leaned back and confessed that one big dish for dinner, like this, was a relief after picking over unsatisfying courses at the club. Later, the two went out on to the bit of verandah apportioned to Walker's use, and mused awhile in rocking chairs.

"You spoke of asking advice," Mackeller suggested.

"There's a story first," Walker answered. "It's about a man named Marshall."

"Who got himself jailed in Colombo—that's the Marshall you mean?" Mackeller half-questioned. The rubber man, up at the club, had told the story of Obadiah's amusing return to the *Sanjredim*, many times.

"Perhaps," said Walker. "Marshall was engaged by Clement Delarey's mother to find Clement. Pernaud and Benson were first employed by her, then Whauple was employed, and then Marshall. And though the old lady hadn't begun to suspect Pierre of any designs on his cousin Clement, Marshall had, as soon as he heard the story of the others."

"If Pernaud and Benson were her men, there's ground for supicion," Mackeller commented thoughtfully.

"Therefore, Marshall got very carefully and thoroughly lost at Colombo, with a very capable man to advertise the fact, and came on here as Walker to save Pierre Delarey the trouble of plotting his disappearance. I believe you're a straight man, Mr. Mackeller, and so don't mind telling you, and in any case Pierre has shown his own hand to me enough to draw his claws. You told me some few things up at the club—"

"It was a clever move, that piece of acting at Colombo," Mackeller said. "Clever, that is, if you mean to carry this thing any further."

"Why the doubt?" Marshall asked.

"Clement Delarey has been lost nearly four years, now," Mackeller explained,

"and so it's a cold trail. You surmise that Pierre is responsible for Clement's disappearance—death, perhaps—and now you tell me that Clement's mother sent those other three men I'm inclined to agree with you. But you can't prove anything against him—Pierre Delarey is a very able man, and something of a power here as well."

"Probably that's all true," Marshall agreed composedly.

"Then what can you do—what steps can you take?"

"I can find Clement, or his bones, or the pot he was cooked in—I don't for one minute think I shall find him living, but I can take the road he took to this myth of yours, Mah-Eng, and get as far along that road as he got, most probably. Anyhow, I gave my word to his mother, and I don't turn back while there's a chance."

Mackeller considered it. "Do you know what you propose?" he asked. "Remember what I told you about chicken-pox inland, and the attitude of the natives toward any white man in consequence of it?"

"I have it all stored away," Marshall answered quietly, "but I'm not frightened. Either there's a man—or maybe two men—somewhere on the other side of the hills and unable to get back, or else there's a bill for two deaths to be presented to Pierre Delarey. Either there will be another death to go on the bill, or, more likely, I will present it to Pierre as it is—or else I'll bring Clement back. I want your advice as to the best way to find where Clement believed he would find Mah-Eng."

Mackeller was silent for a long time. Marshall lighted a cigarette and waited; there was light enough out on the verandah to show him the thoughtful frown on the missionary's face.

"I think," Mackeller said slowly, "you've bitten off a very large piece—you'll need strong jaws to chew it. Remember—all Pierre had to do was to let Clement go inland, a boy on a treasure hunt—the first native village he came on would do the rest. As for Mah-Eng, it's a myth, a superstition."

Marshall smiled. "Very probably," he agreed. "What do you suggest I ought to do?"

"Frankly, I don't know," Mackeller answered. "You have no real ground for accusing Pierre, you have nothing definite to take you on from here—what do you propose to do?"

"To put it more colloquially than politely," Marshall said, "I intend to see this

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thing through or bust. I've undertaken a contract, and it will be fulfilled to the limit of my ability. The first thing is to look for traces of Clement, settle what happened to him."

"I like to hear a man talk like that," Mackeller observed.

The bulky figure of Mrs. Martinez came out of the shadows. "Mr. Walker, there is a gentleman wishes to speak to you," she said, in the clipped, unpunctuated English of her kind.

"Name, please, Mrs. Martinez," Marshall answered. "I am already engaged with this gentleman here."

"His name, too, is Walker and he wishes to see you about your shooting trip he is a verree good young man," the lady intoned.

Marshall turned to Mackeller. "This may be interesting," he said. "Do you mind if I have him up here?"

"Not a bit," Mackeller assured him. "I'm interested."

"Show the gentleman out here, Mrs. Martinez," Marshall said gravely, "and I'll deal with him."

She waddled away, to return with a slim, dark youth, obviously Eurasian—the faint light of the verandah gave no more detail—who faced the two men with perfect assurance.

"YOU wished to speak to me, Mr. Walker?" Marshall asked.

"Yes, Mr. Walker," said the new arrival. "My friend, Mr. de Souza, up at the club, told me you were looking for a man to go on a shooting exploration." He threw out his chest and made the most of his inches. "I, sir, am that man."

Marshall smiled; Mackeller nearly laughed outright; the perky, dandified little figure before them—its duplicates may be found by the score on office stools throughout the East—looked so utterly incongruous with Marshall's requirements.

"And what are your qualifications for a shooting trip?" Marshall asked, amusedly.

"Failed. B. A., sir," the applicant answered promptly—he was used to putting that qualification first in applying for clerkships. "Also, sir, patrol leader, boy scouts, verree good shot, cook, make camp, much tracking experience—" He hesitated, confused, for Marshall was smiling more and more broadly. Mackeller got up and went to the edge of the verandah, so that his face was in shadow.

"Sir," said this other Walker, in a tone of injured dignity, "I did not come to you for one gentleman to insult another, but in good faith to offer you my services. I have the honour, sir, to wish you goodnight."

"Wait a bit," Marshall advised, more seriously. "I want a guide to Mah-Eng—have you ever heard of the place?" He judged that the instinct for romantic adventure that is grained in every boy scout, no matter what his nationality may be, would make this youngster a useful informant on that subject.

"I will show you the direction of Mah-Eng, sir, if you will engage me," Walker promised, with less of offended hauteur.

"But you won't go there with me," Marshall commented, carelessly, "because there is no such place."

"On the contraree, sir, it is a verree real place," the youth assured him, "but I do not wish to go, because nobodee who goes to Mah-Eng ever comes back, and my young lady would not hear of my engaging on so dangerous adventure."

Mackeller came back to his rocking chair, and, seating himself, looked fixedly at the youth. Marshall indicated another chair, back in the shadow. "Draw that up and sit down, Mr. Walker," he invited. "You are a most picturesque exponent of romance, to put it mildly, and good stories always interest me, but don't be offended if I shout for the salt cellar." He waited while the slim youngster brought the chair forward and seated himself gingerly. "Now tell me—why don't they come back?"

Walker looked rather scared at what promised to become an inquisition. "Sir," he said, "I do not know. But when I was a boy, before I assumed the responsibilities of manhood and failed B. A., I took my patrol out to camp in the rubber plantations, and as good scouts should, we tried to learn anything that might be learned about this verree mysterious place. One of the labourers on the plantation, investigated by one of us, told us what we asked about the country on the other side of the hills, where the ground will not grow rubber, and he told us that there is a place called by the natives Mah-Eng, a place from which nobodee ever comes back. The uncivilized men inland know of it and will not go near it, but he could not tell us why nobodee ever comes back. But he said that nobodee ever comes back, and—" He left the obvious conclusion of the sentence unspoken.

"And nobody ever comes back," Marshall ended it for him, gravely.

"Carbon dioxide, or some sort of poisonous gas pervading a sunk valley," Mackeller suggested, "or pure romance."

Marshall reflected over it. "What is your Christian name, Walker?" he asked abruptly.

"Henry Aloysius, sir, failed B. A.," Walker answered promptly.

"I should recommend you to forget that failure. Do you know any of the native dialects about here—apart from bad English and cuss words—any of the talk they are likely to use on the other side of the hills?"

"I am conversant with the languages of the countree," Walker replied, again with a hint of offended dignity.

"Well," Marshall concluded. "One word to any person at all, even to your young lady, will damn your chance of coming with me on a shooting trip—I require absolute silence of you till you come to me at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon for my final decision."

"I will be dumb, sir, as a whited sepulchre," Henry Aloysius promised. "And I may conclude that my application has impressed you favourablee?"

"You may conclude anything you like, till three o'clock to-morrow," Marshall answered. "Meanwhile—your friend de Souza—how did he get to know about this?"

"Mr. de Souza is a waiter at the club, sir—he had the honour of executing Mr. Delarey's orders at lunch."

"Thank you—I shall expect you at three," Marshall told him.

"Well?" he asked Mackeller, when the youth had bowed himself away with elaborate obsequiousness.

"The most erratic race on the earth," Mackeller answered. "Besides, he wouldn't last half a day in bush country—the breed has no stamina, and he'd sicken at once."

"Possibly—it was because of that I wanted to see him in daylight. Anyhow, we know a little more about Mah-Eng, now."

"Carbone dioxide, or pure romance," Mackeller insisted. "Mr. Marshall, my advice—not as Pierre Delarey advised you, but because I'd hate to see a man like you thrown away—is that you don't risk going inland on a cold trail. It's folly."

Marshall smiled. "I intend to look for this Mah-Eng," he said. "It's my job, obviously, and—would you back out, now?"

After a minute or so of silence, Mackeller laughed. "I wish I were coming with you, instead of catching the next boat sbuth," he answered. "The country behind this coast line has always had an attraction for me, but I've never been able to go inland."

"I'd sooner have you with me than any man in Sapelung," Marshall reflected. "Take a month off, and try it."

Mackeller shook his head. "I wish I could," he answered with a sigh of regret, "but, like you, I have to stick to my job. I want to hear your story, though—you wont' find any Mah-Eng, in spite of Henry Aloysius Walker and his account of it, but you'll have a tale to tell."

"The tale of Clement Delarey, I hope," Marshall said, soberly.

"I notice you expect to bring back the tale—not the man," Mackeller observed. "You have formed a theory?"

Marshall nodded. "You saw how the vague legend of Mah-Eng had gripped this Eurasian boy, Walker?" he asked.

"As it would any boy," Mackeller agreed.

"Clement Delarey came out to his cousin—he wanted to make enough money to redeem a debt incurred by his dead father," Marshall said, slowly. "Pierre got the news of his cousin's inheritance in some way and instead of passing it on he told Clement this romance of Mah-Eng—buried treasure, or something of the sort that fired the boy's imagination and made him eager for the adventure. Pierre encouraged him in it, got him to go, and sat tight. Then Pernaud and Benson came. Pierre managed to buy Benson, because two might have got through where one couldn't. Since neither Clement nor Pernaud came back, Pierre trusted in the chicken-pox scare and let Whauple go on, probably quite alone. Perfectly simple and perfectly safe—and Pierre has about three years more to wait before he lays hands on a fortune that will make his store look like a hawker's tray by comparison."

Mackeller nodded thoughtfully, repeatedly. "I agree," he said.

FOR a time they smoked in silence; a little breeze from off the water rustled the tamarisks in the compound and cooled the tropic night; beyond the verandah edge fireflies gleamed transiently in the darkness; they faced inland, and the late moon, not yet risen above the range of hills before them, silhouetted the distant crests against the night sky, and showed up the wedge-shaped cut of the pass. Marshall imagined the boy Clement going up through the pass with all the rash confidence of youth, perhaps turning to look back and down on Sapelung as he went, in utter confidence that he would return

with his task accomplished, and bearing the means to clear his father's name.

"Why do you refuse to believe in this place, Mah-Eng?" he asked.

"Why should I believe in it?" Mackeller asked in return, lazily.

Marshall gazed up at the pass. "It's sixty miles across from here to the sea, in a straight line the way we're facing," he said, "and that pass is a bare ten miles from here. You've got a belt of rubber plantations this side of it, where the soil admits, up and down the coast, but neither you nor any other man seems to know what actually lies behind that range of hills—everybody is so busy this side that they haven't time to look over."

"The soil is no use for plantations, east of the hills," Mackeller explained, "and there are no minerals—no metals."

"There's forty miles of unmapped jungle, which may hold anything on earth."

"You might say the same of western Australia, or of any unsurveyed tract," Mackeller pointed out, with obvious skepticism. "I've been first man over a good deal of new country, and I've heard yarns without end from Singapore to the Solomons, but I never heard of one being proved yet."

Marshall did not answer. From behind the hill crests the moon came into view, making silver magic of the night. Mackeller rose, reluctantly.

"It has been a really refreshing evening," he said, with sincerity. "If I can help you in any way, by advice—or by anything—you have only to let me know—"

* * *

Bob Crawford, frowning over a crochet pattern and counting inaudibly, made a sign to impose silence as her sister-in-law entered the room. Stephanie, a radiant being compared with the girl Marshall had first met—six weeks of freedom from Madame Delarey had caused the difference—came to look at the work.

"Now," said Bob, putting the pattern down, "what is it? Stephanie, you grow prettier every day."

"This is mail day," Stephanie answered. "You don't think anything has happened to him, do you?"

Bob laughed at the suggestion. "I might have thought it if he had written," she said. "My dear, Victor is quite capable of taking care of himself, and after all"—she looked at the tall girl beside her with a sparkle of mischief in her eyes—"why should you worry?"

Stephanie coloured at the implication, rather than at the actual words. "If he does not come back—he provided for me for the year, and no more," she answered.

"And—Stephanie, dear—is that all?"

But Stephanie looked steadily at the would-be-match-maker, her own self-possession fully regained. "He and I made a bargain—that is all," she answered. "Your interpretation of the bargain has been very generous, Bob—"

Bob put up a hand to silence her. "Don't you worry—Victor will be back in time," she prophesied, confidently. "If he's not, we'll find a way over the interval for you, my dear."

By the next mail came a letter for Bob, from Colombo. "A word to you lest I may not get another chance to write," Marshall wrote her. "I get lost here, in case cousin Pierre should be awaiting my arrival at Sapelung. Probably you will hear no more of me for months, but make no inquiries, either of the shipping company or anybody else, and in case Stephanie should be worried by my probable silence, show her this." Here he came to the end of a sheet of paper; Bob turned to the next. "I have a very lively interest in that young lady, Bob, quite apart from her cash value in the event of her step-brother's death. Keep an eye on her—as your brother, I need say no more. And you need not show her this."

Bob handed both sheets on to Stephanie and watched her read them.

" 'Cash value,' " Stephanie quoted, caustically, as she handed the letter back to Bob.

"Apart from it, dear, he says," Bob answered, sweetly.

"Bob," Stephanie asked, with a suddenness that had something of fear in it, "do you think he will come back? I've told you about the others—three men who tried and were never heard of again. Do you think he will be heard of again?"

Bob looked at her and smiled; Stephanie was good to look on, and Bob could well understand that her brother, with all his apparent cynicism with regard to women, might be interested in such a one—more than interested, given the opportunity for seeing her as she was now.

* * *

Where the track that had been nearly a road in character degenerated to a mere rough path, on the way to the cut in the hills, Marshall turned aside to the shade of a big bush and announced that they

would lunch. Henry Aloysius Walker, dripping with perspiration, gave silent concurrence by stepping into the shade, where he dropped his pack like a man exhausted, and crumpled down beside it to mop his face with a rag of a handkerchief that was already soaked.

Marshall regarded his henchman a trifle anxiously. Henry Aloysius had been so anxious to make the trip, had pleaded so earnestly and put forward his qualifications so desperately, that almost against his better judgment and in spite of Mackeller's warning Marshall had engaged him. Now, in drill jacket and shorts, with stout, serviceable boots, a hunting shirt under his jacket and a wonderful wide brimmed felt hat on his shaven head, he looked like collapsing on the first march.

"Tired?" Marshall asked him.

"Not verree, sir," said Henry, trying to look perky and unconcerned. "I am not in condition, as yet. When we have covered some few miles, my natural robustiousness will assert itself—wow!"

The final exclamation was due to the acute penetration of some large black ants —Henry had been sitting on the exit from their underground abode. He gave them the right of way, hastily, and chose another spot with more care.

"Quite right—never argue with ants," Marshall remarked, with complacency—the way in which Henry had jumped proved that there was a good deal of robustiousness in him yet. "Now you can unpack all your belongings for a kit inspection while I get the grub out. I want to see exactly what you're carrying to make you drip so much."

Henry stared, while Marshall set about unwrapping the food Mrs. Martinez had packed according to his directions; he stopped his task in response to the stare. "Well, what about that kit inspection?"

"Sir," said Henry, humbly but firmly, "much of my property is intimate and personal."

"And therefore not to be desecrated by the gaze of the vulgar," Marshall said. "Henry, my boy, remember the first duty of a good scout. Much of your property is obviously weighty—kit inspection, please."

Henry trembled with a great resolve. "I must respectfully decline, sir," he replied, with a sort of timid defiance.

Marshall unwrapped a sandwich and began to munch. "Better have something to eat before you start on your way back, Henry," he observed kindly. "It's downhill, I know, but you'll be hungry before you get back to the roaring traffic of Sapelung."

Henry gazed at his master until the invitation had fully sunk in. Then, with tears in his eyes, he began to unfasten his knapsack.

"Have some grub first," Marshall advised. "Plenty of time for that later. But there's one thing for you to remember, my young friend. As long as our ways lie together there is one will—mine. If I make a mistake I take the blame, and as long as you save me the trouble of turning a request into an order we shall be quite a friendly little party. When you think you know better than I do, it is time to kiss me once on the brows and part—you for Sapelung, and Mah-Eng for me."

Henry listened patiently, and a trifle doubtfully. Then he took a sandwich, bit twice, and reached for another. "Sir, I

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will obey in future," he said, with his mouth very full.

The kit inspection revealed a weighty, leather cased manicure set, a pair of ebony-backed brushes, one suit of pyjamas, a heavy album of snapshot photographs, a new testament, a leatherette case containing half-a-dozen silk handkerchiefs, a volume entitled "Open-Air Cookery," and a silver-mounted leather photograph frame, with folding cover to preserve the glass in front, in addition to what Marshall judged normal requirements for the trip. Marshall selected the testament and the handkerchiefs minus their case, put these on one side, and regarded the rest of the stuff quizzically. Henry looked at his chief, and estimated the probable value of remonstrance; he kept silent.

"Shall we bury 'em, Henry?" Marshall asked.

Henry's lip quivered; he did not answer.

"Supposing you have to run, with half-a-dozen hungry cannibals chasing you, the other side the pass?" Marshall queried again. "Better to bury ebony hair brushes than be killed with intent to salt, my boy."

"My young ladee—she gave me those brushes!" Henry wailed.

"Very nice of her," Marshall assured him, "but what the plague are we to do with 'em? I want to make a man of you, Henry, and I don't despair of the job, but—" He scratched his head in perplexity and swung round at the faint sound of footsteps behind him.

"Hell, but it's Marshall!" said the rubber man. "How in blazes did you get here from Colombo?"

"Oh, I'm a good walker," Marshall answered, gravely.

The rubber man regarded him with amusement. "My place isn't half a mile off—come and have a drink?" he invited. "I saw somebody squat under this bush." He chuckled hugely. "You should have seen that Yankee when he came aboard again!"

"I saw him start," Marshall answered. "I'd love to accept your invitation, but I'm on my way east. Look here." He had a sudden inspiration. "Here's some spare kit we want stored. Will you take charge of it till we come or send, if we made it into a bundle?"

"Sure," said the rubber man, heartily, "but—" His eye fell on the spare kit, and he grinned.

"The fact is," Marshall lied, to spare Henry a possible gibe, "we came with the intention of making a couple of days, but we're going on and may make a week or a fortnight of it. Make a bundle of the spares, Henry, for this gentlemen to take with him."

Henry, on the verge of a second rebellion, thought better of it, but he extracted the photograph from its silver-mounted frame before he packed up the bundle. By the time he had finished, the rubber man understood that Marshall hoped to find game on the other side of the range, and might be away three weeks or more.

"Don't go into the lowlands," he advised, as he took the bundle. "Pity you can't come up and swap yarns over drinks."

"When we come back," Marshall promised. "Take care of these things for my young friend here."

"I thought they weren't yours—you look too old a bird to weight your feathers for a long flight. So long." And the rubber man, kindly as he was loquacious, went his way. Marshall gazed after him.

"There go your treasures and my alias, Henry," he half soliloquised. "And that reminds me—if ever a man begins to tell you something by saying—'the fact is,' or something like it, you can bet he's telling a bigger lie than usual. Remember it."

"It is astonishing, sir, but in similar circumstances I always begin that way myself," Henry admitted.

He placed the photograph he had retrieved inside the testament that Marshall had left him, and repacked his knapsack. Then he slung it on, ready to resume the march.

"Feel lighter?" Marshall queried.

"My back is lighter, but my heart is heavee," Henry answered sorrowfully. "You are very drastic, sir."

"As if I were a pill," Marshall commented "Now, Henry, say all you can remember of 'Excelsior' to yourself, and march. We will sleep the other side of the hill crests to-night."

THEY came out from the pass about an hour before sunset, and Marshall paused to look across the land that the height revealed—they stood, then, about two thousand feet above sea level, as nearly as Marshall could judge. Parched, and thinly covered with stunted scrub, the country fell gently away eastward for miles—there was no abrupt descent from the height at which they stood, as on the coastward side of the range. A mile or more to their right a line of green went

down from the hill crests, showing that a spring in the range gave life to the vegetation of this tableland, but they could see where the plain drank up the last of the water by the abrupt ending of the green and recurrence of stunted, half-dead shrubs.

To their left, a similar line went east, and here the water supply was of a different order, for the bordering verdure went on until a fold in the distance hid it. At the limit of their vision was dark green bounding and contrasting sharply with the dun of the plain, and from among this darker fringe the outlines of hills rose hazed and indistinct; there was a bluish veil over the country, mark of the stillness of this tropic day's last hour.

"The first of the road is easy finding," Marshall remarked, and faced to the left. "We've got to find water, and stick to it, here, and only one of those two lines of stream goes on."

He cast a glance at Henry, who, though the day's march had wearied him, looked far less distressed than when they had stopped to eat on the upward journey. He knew, as Mackeller had said, that there was always the possibility of Henry's crocking up on the march, but the fact that he had questioned the boy with regard to Mah-Eng had been a big factor in his decision to take Henry with him. Had he gone without him, Henry would have talked in Sapelung, and sooner or later his talk would have come to Pierre's ear. Meeting with the rubber man, of course, went a long way to neutralise this reason for taking Henry— the rubber man would certainly talk, when he went in to town. But Henry was shaping fairly well, with his lighter pack, Marshall decided, and— well, if he crocked, he crocked, and that was all.

They struck diagonally for the line of green, and reached it while the sun was yet above the hills. The dwindled stream, between wide banks, gave some hint of the torrent that would pour eastward in the rainy season; for the present, there was water, which was all Marshall wanted.

They camped down for the night, easily; one blanket and a waterproof sheet formed mattress and covering, and the stars made a counterpane—it was enough for such a climate, for even in the hour before dawn there was enough of warmth for comfort, and for the other twenty-three more than enough. Henry snored like a hog, and Marshall determined to limit his evening meal for the rest of the trip; his appetite had left barely enough of Mrs. Martinez's provisioning to admit of a decent breakfast, and beyond that was nothing but the meat lozenges which Marshall carried as an emergency ration.

Wakening early—it was long since Marshall had slept under the stars like this—he found that Henry was still snoring, a sound reminiscent of the trundling of empty barrels on a wooden floor. Marshall gave him a push.

"We've got to shoot pig, not drive it, Henry," he announced, as the boy opened reproachful eyes. "There should be plenty along this watercourse, if we follow it quietly."

They breakfasted; Henry had an idea of making tea, till Marshall assured him that the stores they carried did not include tea. "You've got to learn lots of things," Marshall told him, "we live on the country, or starve. Till we get back within reach of Sapelung, we're hunters, and part of my job is to teach you to hunt."

If Henry's expression were any criterion of his views of the matter, the prospect did not appeal to him. With the cold, disenchanted gaze of the dawn hour, he looked along the bank of the stream—the way they had to travel—and then back at the pass.

"Go back by all means, if you prefer it," Marshall said, interpreting the look. "It's a plain road to Mah-Eng for me, so far."

"I will accompany you, sir," Henry answered, with a show of pride. "It shall never be said that my venerated grandfather had cause to be ashamed of his descendant."

Marshall restrained an inclination to laugh. "My grandfather is dead," he ventured, as a feeler.

"Mine was a sergeant-major in Her Majesty's Army," Henry announced, grandiloquently. "He was verree brave man."

"Long life to him!" Marshall responded enthusiastically. "Now march, Henry."

"But he is dead," Henry stopped to expostulate.

"Never mind," Marshall comforted him. "You'll be dead too, if you don't get the marching over before it gets hot. We take it easy when the sun is high—march in the cool."

Henry, seeing the wisdom of the plan, set out. Although the hill crests behind them cut off the sea breezes, it was cooler at this level than down in Sapelung, and the dryness of the plain helped to make the sun's rays bearable. They tramped on for some eight miles or less, and then,

as both their waterbottles were emptied, Marshall suggested a halt. "And you take the bottles down to the stream and fill them, Henry," he ordered. "I'll wait here for you."

The boy took the two bottles and vanished in the bush; Marshall arranged his belongings and himself, lay down to rest, and saw Henry emerge to the open a couple of hundred yards ahead of their halting place. "Next time you go into bush," he recommended, when Henry had trudged back to him, "blaze your trail as you go. A broken twig will serve to guide you."

He drank, put his topee up to shade his eyes, and promptly went to sleep. When, in mid-afternoon, he wakened, Henry was sitting up regarding his knapsack, which his chief had used as a pillow, with covetous eyes, and looking anything but rested by the halt.

"Hungry?" Marshall asked.

Henry nodded, miserably.

"I've got nothing to eat—have you?"

Henry shook his head, and looked scared.

"That," said Marshall, severely, "comes of gobbling sanwiches overnight. Now we will go and look for pig."

He led the way in toward the stream. They squelched through dank grass over soaked, yielding soil while the sun sank behind them; birds flashed through the boughs overhead, but of ground game none showed. Marshall, unperturbed, felt that Henry was receiving a much-needed lesson, and plodded on, whistling *Annie Laurie* at intervals. Henry plodded silently beside him.

"Why did you want to get out of Sapelung, Henry?" he asked, abruptly.

HENRY maintained so long a silence that Marshall glanced at him, and saw that his brown face had taken on a duskier shade.

"Your kind don't take to the wilds for pleasure," Marshall pursued. "What was at the back of your sudden desire for migration?"

Henry cleared his throat two or three times; it seemed that a confession hovered in his mind, but feared to emerge.

"It's perfectly safe," Marshall assured him. "Bigamy or breach of promise—I'll protect you."

"Nothing so seriouslee damaging, sir," Henry answered in pained tones. "Onlee a slight discrepancee in my accounts—Mr. Delarey's accounts."

"Ah—and you bolted before he found it out?" Marshall surmised.

"I sought the honour of your service, sir," Henry amended, with respectful firmness. "It is not wise to rouse the sleeping dog."

"Especially if you've been monkeying with his bones— Hell!"

The final exclamation was due to the fact that his interest in Henry's confession had rendered him oblivious to the possible presence of pig, and the conversation had put up a herd which, had they kept silence, might have been more nearly approached before they got up from the cool soil in which they had been wallowing. They were on their feet before Marshall had his gun unslung, but he risked a shot at one which showed clearly for a couple of seconds, and the big, lean porker went over and lay squealing—there was far more of luck than aim in the shot. Before half a dozen squeals had gone forth Marshall had finished the work with his hunting knife; he stood back from the quivering carcass and saw Henry's frightened face, but of Henry's squeamishness at the sight of a kill he took no heed. The boy had to be broken to the incidentals of such a journey as this, and rough breaking would be best for him.

"Pork chops, Henry—get a fire going—plenty of dead wood about. I'll cut up the meat this once, though you must take your turn at that too, as we go. Large, juicy pork chops—hustle round and get the fire going—get some dead wood together."

Before they slept, Henry had cooked another day's supply of meat from the carcass under Marshall's direction. They made up a mighty fire, and as they lay by it Marshall heard jackals quarrelling over what they had left of the pig, down in the low grounds by the stream.

He was well content with the day's progress; Henry was shaping well, so far, and he did not show any excessive fear, and already he seemed to be hardening to this form of life. He was preferable, in any case, to a Chinese; it was more than likely that Pierre Delarey would have an interest in any Chinese who might have presented himself as candidate for the trip, in view of Pierre's offer to find one. This youth was transparently free from any Delarey influence.

They set out on the march again at dawn. The character of the country was gradually but surely changing as they descended from the level of the hills; the

starved scrub of the upper plain gave place to large patches of dense bush, with open ground between, on which the roots of shrivelled brown grass needed but the first shower of the rainy season to send a lush green growth pushing through last year's stalks. The stream they followed had lost none of its volume, but rather seemed augmented, though on their side they had passed no tributaries. Looking back, they could see nothing of the pass or of the hill crests, now; bush-clad folds of ground, in between, obscured their westward view. Once or twice Henry looked back anxiously.

"Turn back when you like, Henry," Marshall admonished him. "My road is plain—I can't leave the water."

"I have no anxietee to retrace my steps at present, sir," Henry answered, with pained preciseness.

Marshall smiled—the boy was between the jungle and Pierre Delarey's discrepant accounts—he was afraid to go back, and so must go on.

They halted for the night on a little hillock from which the bed of the stream was visible. Before them, well in sight now at the lower level to which they must descend on the morrow, thick forest growth showed, with the tree tops beneath the level at which they sat—the slope of the land grew steeper as they advanced. In the distance, squat tops of hills thrust out, among them two apparently flat crests close together, on the far horizon—they might have been twenty or thirty miles away. Henry pointed across the wooded growth of the lowlands.

"He said—the man we scouts investigated, sir—that we would see two hills with flat tops close together, and between them no man goes, for there is Mah-Eng."

Marshall gazed long and steadily, noting the conformation of the heights. He saw that, as far as the distance admitted the conjecture, the stream they had followed went straight toward these two hills; there was a sunken line of richer green that showed plainly in the evening light, starting from their left hand as they sat, and, in spite of its meanderings, maintaining an average course toward a point between the pair of hills. This went on for as far as they could see across the jungle, but in the farther distance, between them and the two heights, was a patch of greyish haze, like steam.

"What is that cloud over there—that mist?" Marshall asked.

"I have no conception, sir," Henry answered. "It is a point on which our informant was dumb."

Marshall went on gazing, but the patch of haze did not disperse. Suddenly he remembered a sentence of Madame Delarey's.

"Henry," he asked, "have you ever heard of the valley of silent men?"

"Yes, sir—it is one of the names they used to call Mah-Eng," Henry answered, without hesitation.

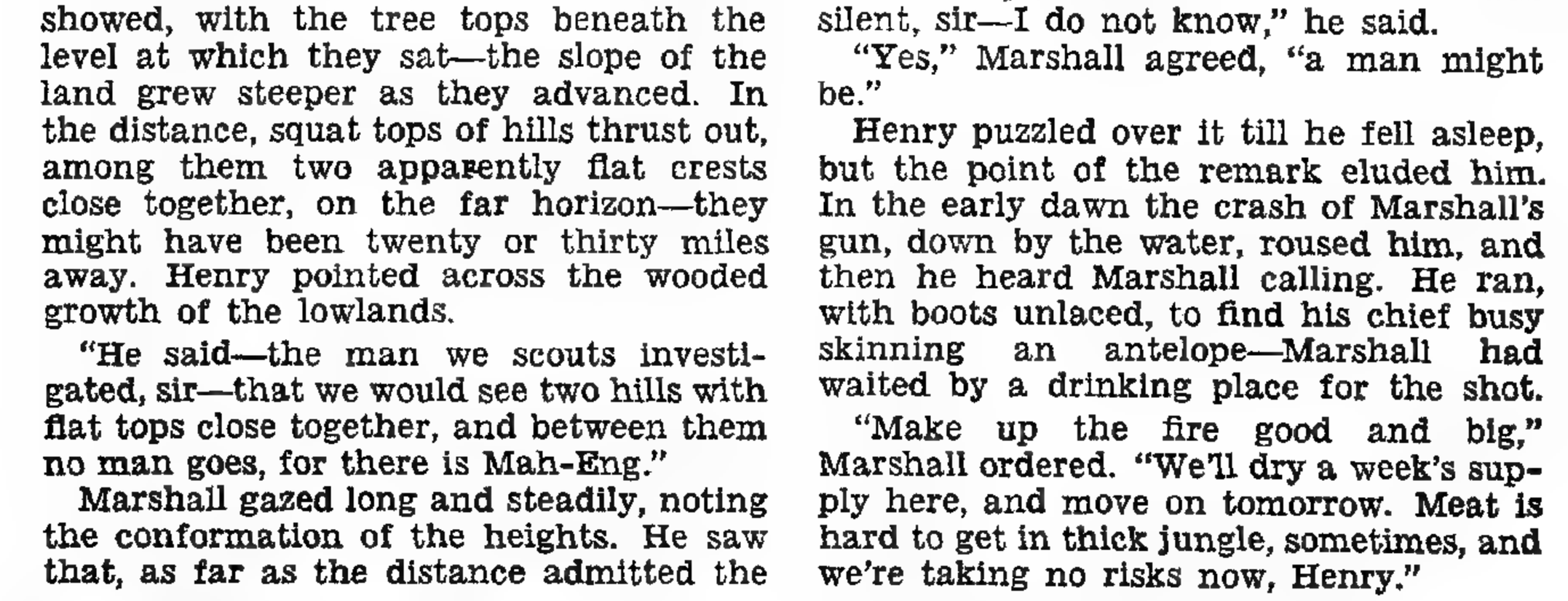
"Then there are no women in the place," Marshall commented.

Henry looked at him in a puzzled way. "On that point also our informant was silent, sir—I do not know," he said.

"Yes," Marshall agreed, "a man might be."

Henry puzzled over it till he fell asleep, but the point of the remark eluded him. In the early dawn the crash of Marshall's gun, down by the water, roused him, and then he heard Marshall calling. He ran, with boots unlaced, to find his chief busy skinning an antelope—Marshall had waited by a drinking place for the shot.

"Make up the fire good and big," Marshall ordered. "We'll dry a week's supply here, and move on tomorrow. Meat is hard to get in thick jungle, sometimes, and we're taking no risks now, Henry."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He had in mind, but would not remark on it to the boy, Mackeller's warning with regard to villages in the jungle and the view their inhabitants might take of a wandering white man. With the possibility of poisoned arrows to face, he had no wish to betray their presence on ahead by gunshots, until absolute necessity forced him to shoot again.

CHAPTER III

NO MAN'S LAND

ON ALL such journeys as this which Marshall undertook, there comes a point at which conversation between the members of the party ceases, except when necessity dictates the use of words. With Marshall and Walker, this point was reached on the fifth day, when Henry had announced that his young ladee, a niece of the Mrs. Martinez with whom Marshall had boarded, was as beautiful as the rose from which she was named. Marshall had congratulated him.

They made about two miles, that day, for the creeper-laced jungle had closed in over them—they were down in the lowlands, now. It was a matter of cutting a way through, often, and Marshall was quite content to cut, for the continuance of wild country meant avoidance of native villages. Henry, in spite of Mackeller's prophecy, held up to his work and showed no signs of flagging; he seemed rather to harden, as they went on. Mackeller may have been right about the peculiar make-up of the Eurasian, judging from some instances he had experienced, but there are in that race as many good, useful members, as in any other, as Marshall knew.

They hugged the bank of the stream—it was almost a river in volume, now—as closely as the going allowed. The way might have been easier on the higher ground, Marshall knew, but at that higher level they might also find inhabitants of the country, for which reason he explained to Henry the meaning of *festina lente*, and kept down in the valley of the stream, rather than try the uplands.

By the time that fifth day ended, Henry began to show distinct signs of uneasiness. They found a dry spot on which to build a fire and sleep, and, instead of curling up to snore, as usual, Henry sat hunched up, gazing into the fire, until Marshall questioned him.

"I am perturbed over the completion of the return expedition," he explained. "There seems some difficultee."

"Naturally," Marshall concurred, heartily, "with those discrepancies in the Delarey accounts waiting for you."

"No, sir, but the perilous adventure of returning—that is what clouds my thoughts."

"Well," Marshall said, "don't let any consideration for me hinder you. If you start back to-morrow morning, you should be safely in Sapelung in four days."

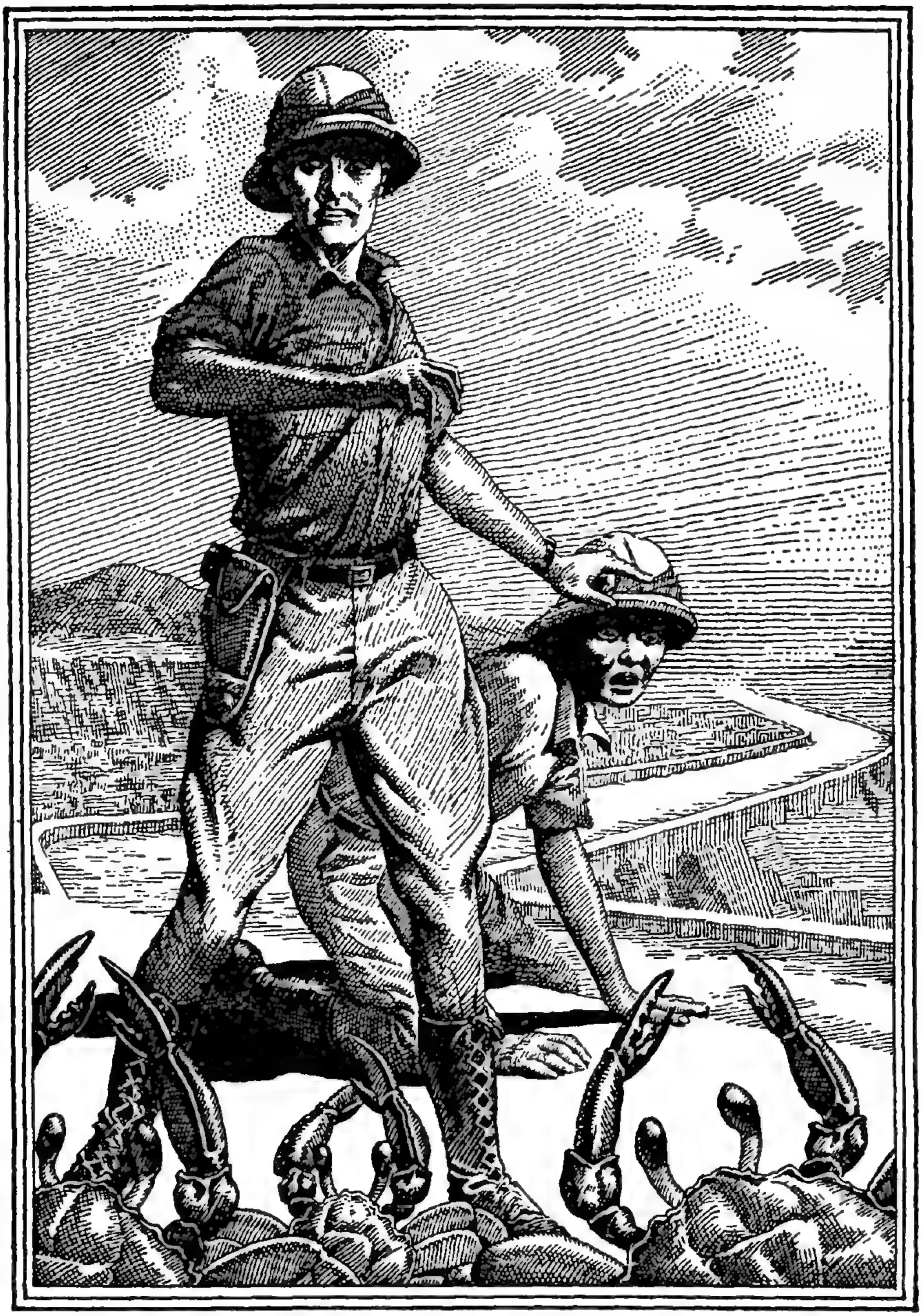
Henry shuddered as if he already felt the hand of the law on his shoulder. "I think, sir, I will guide you a little further," he said.

His guidance, save that he had pointed out where Mah-Eng was reputed to be—and in that might be wrong—was the rankest of fictions, but Marshall let it pass. He felt certain in his own mind that Henry was committed to the full trip—the boy would never venture on the return journey alone, with at least one night in the jungle to face, and perhaps two. And each day's march would bind him more definitely.

It was not his aid that Marshall wanted, for that was almost negligible, so far. The mere presence of another human being in these unpeopled wastes, in case of any untoward happening, was what he desired. He had no intention of chasing his wild geese alone, even with a Henry as alternative to solitude.

Already he began to see it as a wild-goose chase. Mah-Eng might or might not exist; meanwhile, in this dense forest, he might pass within ten feet of Clement Delarey's bones and not know of their existence—he might have trodden on them already, for all that he could tell. All he could do was to follow the river line, find rising ground when he judged himself near the two flat-topped hills, and make for them to see if any trace of Clement could be found. Then back to Sapelung, to make a detailed search for stories of Clement as wind-up to the failure his mission must become—unless, somewhere out here, he could find definite proof of Clement's death. The impossibility of this last grew plainer with every mile of travel; the haystack was prodigious, the needle invisibly small.

Still, they were but five days out, and these lowlands swarmed with wild pig and other game. A fortnight more of this sort of thing was a permissible recreation; Madame Delarey had imposed no conditions, except the impossible one of finding Clement.



"Look!" Henry screamed in terrified falsetto. "Look—the stones are all alive!"

It was not unduly hot, here in the jungle; there was little or no fear of attack by animals of any kind. Certain clawed trees gave evidence of the presence of leopard or some beast of the cat tribe, and jackals howled nightly, but in good game country, such as was this, the carnivorae were not likely to attack so long as the fire was kept up each night—they could find plenty of their normal food supplies. The only matter over which Marshall felt real concern was that of possible poisoned arrows, and he judged that by keeping close to the stream, with a keen eye out for any clearing on either bank, they could avoid that danger—and so far they had seen no trace of man east of the hills.

TWO days later, and possibly four miles further on—for the undergrowth was such that they had to force their way all the time—they had to cross a tributary which came down to the main stream, but the water came very little higher than Henry's knees. Then for some reason—poorer or thinner soil, Marshall judged—the jungle growth thinned considerably, and they made quite six miles in one day, still seeing no trace of human beings except each other.

"Odd," Marshall remarked, when they had settled for the night. "Why is this land deserted, Henry?"

Henry shook his head dubiously, and scratched his back with a stick. "The mosquitoes, sir, I think—the natives do not know your prescription, possiblee."

Marshall had a preparation that reeked of the infernal pit itself but kept mosquitoes off—without it the lowlands would have been unbearable, for mosquitoes swarmed all the way. With this protection, the two were almost immune from bites.

"It may be that," Marshall agreed.

"Or it may be that the place Mah-Eng is near," Henry surmised. "They all fear that place greatlee."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to get on high ground tomorrow and have a look around," Marshall thought aloud. "I begin to feel that we're traveling blind, now, Henry—this river may be twisting, for all we can tell. Ten or twleve points on the compass would be enough to make us miss your two hills."

"They are not my hills, sir," Henry said, seriously.

"Never mind— we'll take a few observations tomorrow, when we get going—just to make certain of direction."

But, almost as soon as they set out next morning, it became apparent that no observations were necessary. At less than a quarter of a mile from their halting-place the bush ended with startling abruptness—it was like walking out unexpectedly from standing corn on to newly ploughed land—and they came to arid soil, loose and powdery, extending down to within a couple of hundred yards of the river bed, and rising from the stream to their right in a big, swelling curve. Ahead of them rolling slopes, supporting here and there a tuft of dead, coarse grass, and at intervals a tortured-looking cactus growth, replaced the level of the lowlands through which they had come; in a continuing hollow on their left the river flowed, a good dozen yards in width and along so straight a course that it seemed more canal than river.

The farther bank was sandstone cliff, rising perhaps fifty feet above the water level, with straggly verdure showing at the top; before them, away from the river, the rolling slopes went up to a height of about three hundred feet, with an equivalent rise on the other side of the stream, and as the rise went on the valley of the river narrowed to a defile, and made a bend to the left. Just over the bend the flat tops of the two hills showed, marking where Mah-Eng should be—if it existed.

Each step taken in this loose soil raised fine dust, so that before Marshall and Walker had advanced far over the barren stretch they were coated with the greyish stuff to the waist, and a light breeze from westward drove the dust before them; they breathed it, and their throats grew parched, while there was a salty taste about the stuff which showed why this stretch of country would not support vegetation.

"Stop, Henry," Marshall said. He unslung his gun and trailed its butt in the dust before him, marking a rough line transversely to their direction of march. Henry looked at him apprehensively.

"We've got meat for two days—if we go very sparingly, perhaps for three," he said. "By the looks of things, our easy time is over—there may not be another sight of game worth shooting for a week, and whether there are fish in that river is something we don't know, while we've nothing to catch 'em with if there are. You've played up well, so far, and now it's up to you. Once you step over that line I've drawn, there's no going back to Sapelung till I go back—and I'm going on to Mah-Eng."

Henry looked back at the jungle and forward at the barren land. Without a word he stepped over the line.

"That," said Marshall quietly, "is exactly what your grandfather would have done, Henry."

The boy smiled with pleasure, and it struck Marshall that he was not a bad-looking youth, on the whole. He had shaped well, too; the choice of him for companion had fully justified itself, so far.

They passed from the dusty rise to baked, cracked, hard earth, like the dried bed of a pond, and topped the summit of another rise—they were more than a mile from the river channel, then, for Marshall had set a course for high ground—to see before them a stretch of yellowish-white, glistening surface, the dried bed of a salt pan nearly a mile in extent from brim to brim. Away off to their right showed foliage, and at a couple of points thin lines of smoke went up, denoting human habitations—the villages of the savages they had missed, Marshall judged. In front of them was a low-hanging haze, as of steam, lying directly across their route. They went through the salt pan, their feet crunching among the dirty crystals as if they walked in frozen snow, and then again Marshall steered to the left, where a ridge marked the boundary of the dried lake's bed; beyond this boundary the ground fell steeply to the river, as they saw when they came to the crest of the ridge.

Here Marshall paused, and looked thoughtfully along the course of the stream. "It isn't natural," he said, and looked back at the forest covered lowlands they had left. "Henry, it's my belief that the ground we've come over was once a big lake, and somebody let the water out by cutting a channel for our river, through this rise."

"It would be a mightee big work, sir," Henry commented, dubiously.

"Well, maybe it was so, and maybe it wasn't," Marshall said. "If there has been a lake there, an overflow in this direction might have started the river, and it gradually cut its own channel down to the present level. But it's a mighty regular cut. Anyhow, it's none of our business as yet."

He led the way down to the river, where they stripped and bathed to get rid of the irritating, salty dust. When they had dressed again, they found a fissure by the bank which gave shade for their noontide rest.

In the afternoon they climbed back to the higher level of the plain, for there were waterworn cracks and fissures down by the river bank which made progress impossible there.

They made no fire, that night, for lack of material. Marshall doled out a sparing ration of their cooked meat, and then they slept uneasily. There was an intermittent noise, rather like an engine a long way from them blowing off steam, and Henry remarked on it in a scared way; Marshall pointed out that it had been going on ever since they stopped, at intervals; it was probably a waterfall further down the course of their stream, or a tributary stream tumbling in from one bank or other; if it were anything actively dangerous, it would either have come nearer or stopped altogether, not merely maintained itself.

He lay long awake, uneasy with regard to the boy beside him. He could tell that Henry was awake too, probably yearning for the easily won pork chops of the lowlands, and afraid of this barren land to which they had come—the picnic days had ended with a suddenness that made Marshall himself wonder what lay before

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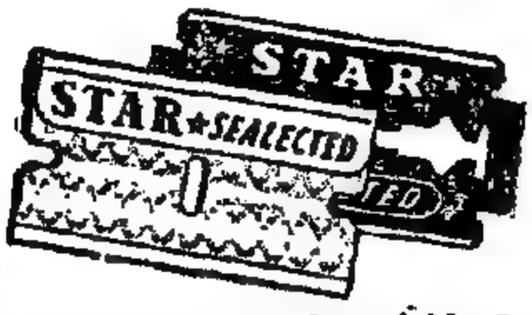

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them now. They had, as he had said, just enough food for three days, his meat lozenges would cover another four, at the most, which meant that they might tramp on for another four days from now, and then, unless they came on fresh supplies of food, must turn back and regain hunting country. Alone, Marshall would have gone on while a scrap of sustenance remained, but he dared not take an equal risk on Henry's behalf—the boy threatened to become as much a responsibility as a companion, now.

IT WAS mid-afternoon of the next day when they found the source of the noise that had perturbed them. The mist they had seen from a distance proved on near acquaintance to be a low-hung vapour with a sulphurous tang, which made eyes smart and set throats aching; it came out from fissures in the ground, and there were little pools of frothy mud that boiled like infernal cauldrons, bubbling and spitting, and in a hollow a spout from some underground kettle sent forth a roaring jet of steam every two minutes—Marshall timed the intervals and found them exact.

There were not less than ten acres of these hot springs and geysers, and beyond this tract was a dead crater of scoriae and rubble, twenty feet or less above the general level of the country—it seemed that a volcano, in attempting to form, had extinguished itself. On the far side of the crater was rolling grass land, with patches of bush at intervals, and outcrops of naked, bluish rock, red-veined—a sort of ironstone, Marshall concluded. He smiled in remembering Mackeller's declaration that there were no traces of metallic ores inland.

"No man's land," he said, thinking aloud as much as speaking to Henry. "It's only natural they should stick to good rubber-growing country like that along the coast, rather than come in here. Yet if they built a railway down to that low jungle, they might raise good cocoa crops, for one thing."

"I have not seen a railway, except in pictures," Henry remarked.

"What struck me as more curious still, as we were crossing that salt pan, is that probably you've never seen snow," Marshall said.

"No, sir," Henry agreed, rather sadly, "I have never been so luckee in my travels."

That afternoon Marshall bagged a big, heavy bird down by the river with the first shot cartridge he had used, and they fed full of the coarse, rather rank flesh—it was waterfowl of some kind, but neither of them was naturalist enough to define the species.

They had gone but a little way on the following morning before Marshall became almost convinced that the channel of the river was artificial, rather than naturally worn through the country. The two flat-topped hills were very near, now, the one on the right bank of the river—the bank they had followed—being little more than a couple of miles distant; the stream at this point flowed between containing walls, inclined at an acute angle from the water level, and too regular in form to be natural, in Marshall's opinion. Their way along the top of the right bank was a sort of terrace, about twenty feet in width; to their right as they went the hillside sloped up with increasing steepness. Sometimes snakes slid away from boulders beside which they had been basking, and the terrace floor, at first grass covered, grew bare and rubbly with loose fragments of rock that had tumbled as boulders down the hillside, at some time, and shattered on reaching this level. When they made their mid-day halt the water bottles were but a third full, but the incline of the river bank, a thirty foot drop or more, was too smooth and steep for them to climb down; it was more like a made escarpment than a natural, irregular bank. A bend to the right, curving the river round the base of the hill they were approaching, prevented sight of what lay beyond.

"I do not like this countree," Henry remarked, after stubbing his toe against a rock

"No," said Marshall, "it's not very exciting, on the whole. Too many snakes for my liking."

The reptiles rustled away at intervals, hissing as they fled. There was a sense of intense loneliness, different altogether from the jungle with its many noises; it was as if they had come to a part of the world that was unpeopled because unfinished, and Marshall found the sound of his own voice uncanny, as if it were an unfitting irruption on the deadness of this land. Their footsteps had an echoing quality among the loose stones, and if either of them moved a rock by stepping on it, the rattle seemed to rouse muted echoes. At intervals Henry looked about him in a frightened way, though apart from the snakes, harmless enough so far, there was no visible cause for fear.

The terrace along which they went nar-

rowed as the hill on their right towered over them more and more, a wall of bare rock almost perpendicular, now. They came at last to a point where their way ended at a smooth incline, far too steep to admit of their climbing down, but with enough of slope for one to slide down it, at a pinch. It was like a sloped, gigantic step, between twenty and thirty feet in depth, and beyond it the rock terrace went on, about six feet above the level of the river, which flowed beside it in a regularly cut rock channel. Marshall looked up the hillside on their right.

"We can't climb up there," he said. "We must either slither down this slide or go back and see if we can get round the other side of the hill—which is it to be, Henry?"

But suddenly Henry stretched out a pointing finger. "Look!" he screamed, in a terrified falsetto. "Look—the stones are all alive!"

He shrank back toward the edge of the steep incline till Marshall grasped his arm to save him from falling over backward. It seemed, in truth, as if the loose stones of the terrace over which they had come were rising up against them, at first, but then Marshall saw that the things were land crabs, their stalked eyes moving as they came out from among the boulders toward the prey they scented.

There were little fellows that trundled along with antennae waving, big, heavy, fearsome looking things that lumbered onward, their carcasses eighteen inches and more across, their mighty claws capable of snapping a man's thigh-bone, and between the great and the small were all gradations of growth and age, a hideous crew extending the full width of the terrace as the two men caught sight of them—within a minute of Henry's scream the way seemed alive with them, and Marshall knew it was quite impassable. He picked up a heavy, rounded stone, and trundled it at the advancing horrors with all his force; it went over one small crab and smashed him, and then came to rest in upsetting a hurrying giant; a dozen of the things crowded with snapping claws round the crushed shell of their fellow, and the rest came on.

"Over with you—slide down, Henry!" Marshall shouted. "We're dead if we stop here."

Henry sat down at the edge of the rock incline and looked fearfully before him, but Marshall gave him a push that started him moving, and followed clattering to the lower level. A couple of the crabs came down, too, but Marshall, on his feet at once, squashed them with rocks, and no more followed—the rock slope was too smooth to afford them claw-hold, and apparently these two had come involuntarily, for none of their fellows showed at the edge above.

Marshall found himself trembling with the horror of the sudden attack and narrow escape from as ghastly a death as one could well imagine. Beside him Henry was half-sobbing, in the extreme of fear.

"God!" Marshall said. "I don't wonder the natives keep away from Mah-Eng."

Henry looked at him accusingly. "I told you, sir, nobodee ever goes back," he wailed. "How can aneebodee go back?"

But Marshall, standing with his back to the river, was staring at the rock wall on their right—it was almost perpendicular, here. Seeing his intent expression, Henry turned and stared, too.

"Somebody else has had a similar idea to yours, Henry," he said.

Daubed on the rock wall, in a yellowish, clayey wash, were the words:

Do Not Climb Up Here.
Savage Land Crabs At the Top.
By Order. E. Whauple.

"He may think that humorous," Marshall remarked, with an angry little laugh, "but it's a painfully poor joke, in my opinion."

"AND now what?" Marshall reflected aloud. He had got back his composure, and was looking about him carefully. Henry also looked about him, but as if he expected a land crab to dart at him any minute; he shook his head dolefully.

"He said nobodee ever goes back," he mourned aloud.

"Henry," Marshall said sternly, "when I made a line in the dust I told you that you'd come on to Mah-Eng with me if you crossed that line. What would your grandfather think of you if he saw you in a blue funk like this?"

Henry pulled himself together with an effort. "My grandfather—he did not have to stand against ferocious crabs," he argued.

"Neither did you," Marshall pointed out. "You just sat down and slid away from 'em when I pushed you. You're unhurt, that sign-painting on the rock proves us on the right track, and probably there's a restaurant open just round the corner. We can't go back among the crabs, we can't climb this hill, and we can't swim back up the river—there's nothing for it but to go on."

Henry considered the statement, and brightened up considerably. "Then, sir, I conclude we shall go on," he suggested.

"If all your answers had been as brilliant as that, you'd never have failed the B.A. exam," Marshall told him. "We will now march."

They followed the curve of the terrace around the base of the hill; on the far side of the river, the valley between them and the other hill widened out, and now it was perfectly obvious that the rock channel in which the river flowed had been artificially cut, for it was above the level of the valley, a furrow traced in the side of the hill. Marshall, looking out to the left, saw that the valley on the other side of the stream sank to a considerable depth; a light veil of bluish haze which hung over it prevented him from seeing what it contained.

It was then about the middle of the afternoon. Still trudging on, they came to where a man sat on the river's brink, fishing with a primitive sort of pole. He turned at sound of their footsteps, lifted his line from the water, and jumped up. He was dressed more simply than adequately, a waist cloth of coarse greyish stuff and a goatskin coat completing his attire, save that he wore a skin cap like that attributed to Crusoe. His face was black-bearded and monkeyishly ugly, and where his skin showed he was sun-browned and hairy. Marshall stared at him.

"What—more mugs?" he asked, grinning broadly.

"Are you Erasmus Whauple?" Marshall inquired, none too pleasantly.

The other man laughed, heartily. "That's me," he answered. "Lord, and you've come on the same old trail—the old lady's still sending 'em! Any more behind?"

Marshall disregarded the query. "Did you paint that fool notice on the rock?" he asked.

Erasmus laughed again. "It amused the youngster—Clement—no end," he answered. "I used to do lots of funny little things to amuse him."

"Used to?" Marshall repeated, questioningly.

"Before he went down—down there among the silent men," Erasmus explained, nodding across the river toward the sunken valley. He grew suddenly serious, and appeared rather embarrassed. "Guess you'll be hungry, you and your young friend—I know that turnpike you've come over. They grow a sort of fish in this river that tastes as good as sole, but it ain't flat. It's over a week since I caught one, so the next is about due—" He seemed to be talking for talking's sake, but broke off abruptly. "Come and have some grub, and we'll swap lies. What won the Derby?"

"You can search me," Marshall answered, drily.

The inconsequence of Whauple had something comic about it.

Barefooted though he was, Whauple made nothing of treading among the loose stones strewn over the way, and led them on round the bend to where the terrace widened to fifty feet or more; there were three large buildings against the perpendicular side of the mud cement, and with thatched grass roofs. The nearest of these was adorned with a legend daubed in its end in the yellowish wash Marshall had already seen. *CYCLISTS' REST. TEAS AND LIGHT REFRESHMENTS. POPULAR PRICES. TIRES REPAIRED*, it said. Whauple indicated it with a gesture.

"He laughed like anything when I did that," he explained. "You get stuck in a place like this, and little things count for a lot. Altogether I kept him pretty well amused."

"Clement Delarey?" Marshall asked.

"That same," Erasmus answered.

He led them past the three buildings to an oblong hole in the cliff, the size and shape of an ordinary doorway, and held aside a curtain of woven grass. "My boudoir," he explained. "It's humble, but my heart's in the right place. Don't put your feet on the piano, and mind the Pekingese."

He followed them into a large, bare chamber, evidently cut out of the solid rock. A dim light filtered in through the curtain over the doorway and showed a bed of dried grass against the far wall, and a couple of rudely made three-legged stools. "I'll worry round and get you some grub," Erasmus promised. "Caviare is off, and oysters are out of season—something in aspic with a salad, and a bottle off the ice—" Still talking, half to himself, he went out again.

Henry, scared and silent, went and looked at the rough bed as if it might tell him something. Marshall unslung his gun and pack, put them down, and sat on one of the stools to wait. Presently Whauple reappeared with a bowl of milk in one hand and a flat open basket, containing meal cakes and slabs of cold meat, in the other.

"I borrowed this lot from Tari-Hi's es-

tablishment," he announced. "You ought to feel proud."

"Who's Tari-Hi?" Marshall asked.

"He's the lord high boss—chief bottle washer and box-office keeper," Erasmus answered. "You'll see—Lord, if you could know how good it is to roll my tongue round good English words again—I could hug the pair of you! If that youngster don't speak English tell him in his own lingo to come and tuck in on this fodder. Is Pierre Delarey still in Sapelung, blast him?"

"Was a fortnight ago," Marshall answered. "Come and eat, Henry. This, Whauple, is Mr. Henry Walker, who made the trip with me."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Walker," said Whauple.

"As good a companion as I could wish for this journey," Marshall added.

Henry, having inspected the contents of the basket, took a meal cake and a piece of meat, and set to work. Marshall, also eating, turned to Whauple.

"Where is Mah-Eng?" he asked.

Whauple laughed loudly. "You're here—this is," he answered, at the end of the laugh.

"But where—this isn't all, surely?" Marshall persisted. "What's in that valley the other side of the river?"

Whauple grew grave. "Silent men," he answered. "Prisoners for life—silent men. Quite happy, though."

MARSHALL ate in silence for awhile; it was obvious that Whauple would present difficulties when it came to extracting information from him, not because he wanted to withhold particulars, but because he appeared carelessly incapable of telling a connected story. Probably he had been here long enough to accept the strangeness of the place as normal, and did not realize that it must strike newcomers as anything but normal.

"What is your grudge against Pierre Delarey?" Marshall asked.

"Him—the dirty swine!" Whauple answered. "He sent that poor boy here, and did his damnedest to get me poisoned off—I would have been, too, if I hadn't suspected something of the sort."

"How was that?" Marshall persisted, determined to get to the bottom of one thing, at least.

"Fitted me out with a Chinese guide, all complete," Whauple said. "The beggar piloted me on till we could see the hot springs, but I did all my own cooking, so he couldn't use his ground glass on me. Then he tried to knife me when I was asleep, but I sleep like a weasel, and I kicked his ear round to the front of his chest and he made off back—I've got his ground glass for evidence, though. He left most of his traps—Pierre set him to murder me, sure."

"Are you sure?" Marshall asked. He remembered how, back at the club in Sapelung, Pierre had offered to find him a Chinese guide. It might have been innocently intended, and again—

"I was sure as soon as I'd heard young Clement's yarn," Whauple answered. "Pierre filled him up with stories of the wonderful fortune he'd find here, made him up a spanking outfit to come with, and paid a couple of guides to bring him past the hot springs and then bolt—they were Chinks, too, and one of 'em was my precious murderer. If only I could get back to Sapelung, Mister Pierre's number goes up."

"Then why not go back?" Marshall asked.

"Ah, why not?" Erasmus echoed, solemnly. "That's where the cow begins to bark. What did you say your name was?"

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"I didn't say, but it's Marshall. Why not go back, though?"

"Nobody ever goes back from Mah-Eng," Erasmus answered, and Henry, eating steadily, nodded a heartfelt assent. "One way there's crabs, one way there's a waterfall you can't get down, one way there's spiders, and then there's the fields of sleep, as they call 'em here. Say, you talk this lingo?" He wound up with a couple of sentences in one of the commoner dialects of the islands, and Marshall nodded.

"You'll do, then—they talk it here, except for their infernal church service and among 'emselves at times. If I talked all night I couldn't tell you half about this place, but there's plenty of time—more time than you want, I'll bet."

Again Marshall thought. "Why not make a boat and go up the river?" he asked, still intent on the problem of getting away.

Whauple made a little derisive sound, indicative of the impossibility of such a plan. "I've not been here more than a year without thinking of everything," he said. "There's a look-out up the hill all day, and a guard at night—and they feed their blasted crabs to make 'em stop just there. Anyone can slide in here, but they never let anyone out. And there's been dozens, ever since the Dutch first settled in these parts, mynheers and Spanish dons, and beachcombers and roustabouts, a proper old packet when you come to count 'em all up. Not one of 'em ever got out."

"But why—why do they want to keep you here?"

Whauple made a gesture that implied the question was beyond him. "You'll have to ask Tari-Hi," he answered "He'll spin you the yarn, and you can see the lies smoke as they come between his teeth. I forget half of it, but the other half is that if you make a second attempt at getting away they use what's left of you for crab-fodder. I got that warning from Tari-Hi after the first attempt."

"You tried to go up the river?" Marshall asked.

"To swim it," Whauple answered, nodding agreement. "Tari-Hi let me off that time, because I'm handy about the place, fishing and things like that—my little trick of making bone fish-hooks properly made him sneeze with joy. He loves me like a brother, but he wouldn't let me off if I tried it again."

Henry looked at the remaining contents of the basket, and decided he would risk just one more.

"Say, Mr. Walker," Erasmus remarked, "you got a hollow tooth?"

"My dental equipment is perfect, thank you," Henry answered, pleasantly, and proved it by smiling.

"And no signs of wear on the grinders," Erasmus concluded, gazing pensively at the basket.

Growing used to the dim light, Marshall saw that the chamber was cleanly hewn in the hillside; there was a shelf about five feet up from the floor, running round the back and two sides, about a couple of feet in width, and from the level of the shelf the walls sloped inward to the ceiling, which was about fifteen feet above the floor level. Whauple's gaze followed his to the shelf.

"Make bed up there in the rainy season," he explained. "There's snakes and centipedes and things, then. You two better pig in with me, for a start—I've told Tari-Hi about you, but you won't see him till tomorrow. I'll get two beds put in for you."

"Up on the shelf, please," Marshall asked.

"Anyhow you like—only too happy to oblige," Whauple said. "Do you know by any chance if Tottenham Hotspur won the cup last year?"

"I don't know—football never interested me," Marshall answered.

Erasmus stared hard. "You don't know who won the cup—and you come on a job like this?" he ejaculated, as if it were incredible. "Ah!" and his voice sank almost to reverence, "To hear 'em on the Palace ground when the Spurs shove it in the net—that's life, that is." He mused over it, tenderly.

"What about the people here—who lives in these buildings outside?" Marshall asked.

"Storehouses, these, and one for the guard at night," Erasmus answered, rousing from his reverie on life's joys. "And the people—there's Tari-Hi, and Drua, his old father, and me, and Aia, and Milu and his wife and two kids. That's the population, and we all have our holes in the hill. Tari-Hi ought to be up from the silent fields, soon, Aia's pretty sure to be with old Drua somewhere down toward the waterfall, and Milu and his crowd may be anywhere. I've heard nothing of the two kids since before I went fishing. Let's go outside—I left my rod up by the bank, and I don't want those kids to find it."

They followed him out. It was near on sunset, and a wind from the east, cool and refreshing, swept along the face of the cliff—Marshall thought the tang of sea air was in it.

"Wait here a bit," Whauple asked, and left them—they saw him enter a hole in the rock similar to his own, farther along the cliff face. After a brief while he returned. "Milu's there," he said, almost apologetically. "I was asking him if he could order your beds to be fixed up."

HE led the way onward without further explanation, while Marshall wondered, if the population consisted of those whom he had named, who should fix up the beds save Milu himself—whoever he might be.

"I thought you said Clement Delarey was here?" he asked.

"Down in the fields of sleep," Whauple answered. "Not up here any more, except when he comes up to see me—and that ain't often."

Marshall felt a sudden gust of irritation in which he mentally labelled the man beside him as an irresponsible chatterer; his ridiculous signs daubed on the rock were an impertinence, and he himself a thoughtless fool. They walked on in silence to where the discarded fishing rod lay—it was a plain bamboo pole with a coarse line—and Whauple picked it up. Marshall looked out over the river at the valley beyond; now that the haze which he had noted at first had cleared off, the valley floor showed as a cultivated area, some miles in extent, shut in by walls of rock, with thatched roofs here and there among the fields. Irrigating channels gleamed in the light of the sun, and there were patches of some growth which bore white flowers in such profusion as to look like cherry orchards in spring.

"Why is Clement Delarey down there while you are up here?" Marshall asked, abruptly.

"He preferred it," Erasmus answered, with indifference. "There was a girl down there, one of the head men's daughters." He turned on Marshall suddenly, eagerly. "Say, did you bring anything to smoke with you? I'd sell my soul for a full pouch and a pipe."

Henry produced a tin from his pocket, and extracted a cigarette from it. "Allow me, Mr. Whauple," he said, politely, and as Erasmus took the cigarette carefully, almost reverently, he followed it up with an automatic lighter, one of the kind that operates by means of sparks on a length of tindery matter.

"Suffering hambone, but you're a friend indeed, Mr. Walker!" he remarked. He got a light and inhaled with vigour. "The first gasper since I left Sapelung behind. If we had some coffee and liqueurs, now, heaven would be a poor place."

"Whauple," Marshall said, almost angrily, "I keep trying to get at reasons for things, and every time you fly off at a tangent. Can't you realize that we know absolutely nothing of why you're here still, why Clement Delarey is down there instead of up here with you, or what the mystery is about this place? I want to know—you may be content to sit here, but I'm going back to Sapelung, with Clement, if not with you. That's why I keep on asking—I want to know."

Whauple shook his head gravely. "I was like that when I came, but I'm wiser now," he said. "I got angry, and tried to get away—I've been through it all, till I found it was no use worrying. Now I'm just amused—there's lots to amuse you here, if you look at it the right way."

"Which tells me exactly nothing," Marshall snapped. "I'm not amused—I want to know."

"Well," said Erasmus, rather grimly, "I'll tell you one thing. You'll never take Clement Delarey away from here."

"Why not—what's to hinder me?"

"He is. He's gone among the silent men—he's a silent man, now, because the girl lived down there and he went to her. I tried to argue him out of it, but he said we'd never get out, and he might as well be with the girl as mope up here away from her. You could as soon take a fish out of water and expect it to live as move him out from that valley for more than a day or two. He'd die just like the fish."

Marshall stared, half in unbelief and half in fear at the ring of truth in Whauple's tone. "Now—now we're getting at it," he said. "I want you to explain that."

"Oh, that's what's worrying you, is it?" Erasmus queried.

"That for one thing," Marshall agreed.

"Well—you see that white flower down there—the patches of shrub?" He pointed down toward the sunken valley.

Marshall nodded. The tracts of flowering shrub were conspicuous enough, now that the haze had disappeared.

"IT'S—what did they call it in the story-books?—upas. Yes, upas—the plant that's only a yarn. I don't know

what the proper name of the stuff is, or if it ever had a name given to it. It's got a smell like—you'll smell something like it in heaven, if you've got a through ticket —it's the loveliest scent a man ever dreamed, a smell to make you see visions. You can sniff it once or twice—I have—and there's no harm, but if you stop as much as a day in it you get a sort of slight swelling, here"—he put his forefinger up to the side of his throat, under his lower jaw—"and your voice gets husky. And that's the beginning of the trouble."

Marshall did not speak. Henry, round-eyed with fear, stared at Whauple.

"And then," Whauple went on, "you come away—Clement came away—and you go sick and shuddery and achy, just as they say drug-takers do, and you must have another dose. So you go back till you can breathe the scent of that plant that seeded in hell, for sure, and your voice gets huskier, and you stop there, partly because you don't like to come away from that perfect smell—it's like wine to you, and better than wine—and partly because you know if you do come away you'll die, after a day or two."

Marshall smiled. "Pass the salt cellar!" he said, derisively.

"You wait," Erasmus bade "I thought it was only a fairy tale—you wait till you see young Clement, and hear him whisper —he's got no voice to talk with, now."

"Impossible," Marshall said, more seriously. "A plant couldn't have that effect—"

"Clement—he knew a little about medical things—meant to be a doctor, he told me—" Whauple went on explaining. "He said the effect of the plant was to kill—atrophy was his word for it, I remember —to atrophy some glands in the throat, and the scent compensated for what the glands ought to supply, nearly—not quite, or else you wouldn't lose your voice, but enough to keep you alive and healthy as long as you stop within reach of the smell. He said it was like the way the thyroid gland gets atrophied in some people, so you have to give 'em doses of thyroid gland to keep 'em alive. That cursed plant is the dose these people in the valley have to take, or else they'll die. If one of 'em stops out of the valley too long, he goes to sleep and you can't wake him—you have to get him carried back down into the valley—into the smell—before he'll wake."

"But why keep it up—why not destroy the plant, and let it all die out?" Marshall asked, argumentatively.

"They have children—silent children—" Whauple suddenly turned away and looked up the hillside. After a minute or so he turned to Marshall. "I knew a kid —a youngster that used to laugh and shout when he played—till he died," he said, huskily. "These poor little devils—they can't laugh out loud, and they can't shout—even the goats don't bleat, down there."

"And this chief—Tari-Hi—is he silent, too?" Marshall inquired.

Whauple shook his head, then shouldered his rod and pointed at the sky; the sun had sunk out of view, though its light still illumined the upper slopes of the hills.

"He and Milu—Tari-Hi's wife was a valley woman, but she came up here for Aia to be born, and Aia's never been near the weed for it to make her silent—there's always two families up here, always have been. It's custom. You must ask Tari-Hi about that—his yarns are too tall for me. He'll talk all you like, if you get him going. Let's get back, now—plenty of time to talk later."

He led the way "First time I've had the chance to talk English since I left Sapelung," he said. "There's been times when I've nearly gone mad, thought of going down to the fields to get drunk on that scent—it's tempting, alone here, and Mah-Eng ain't exactly a private bar with the drinks set up free. But I got over it—I'm just amused, now, and now there's somebody to talk to, it won't be near so bad."

"It strikes me, Whauple, that you're a man of uncommon courage," Marshall answered, with sincere admiration for one who could face a situation like this in such a way.

"The drinks are on me," Whauple said, drily, "but I can't ask you to have one. Early closing day, I think."

"But"—Marshall looked about him—"you said there was a guard, up here?"

"So there is—why not?" Whauple answered. "They come up in the morning for look-out and go back at night, and the guard comes on from dark to dawn. It's not till the second day they go to sleep, if they come away from the plant." He pointed up the hillside. "There's a man up there now, and he's got a gong because he can't shout—half a drum or some sort of thing that he can beat to make a row. Don't you worry yourself—there's no getting out from Mah-Eng."

He led the way back to his boudoir, as he had called it. When they entered they

found more meal cakes and milk set ready for them on the rock floor, and on the shelf at the side were two beds of grass, like that which Erasmus had made down on the floor.

"All fixed up," Erasmus announced, "and we can eat till we're tired, and then sleep it off. One thing I admire about Milu is that I never have to do any housework—he makes the fellows from the valley do it all for me, and that's lucky, for I wasn't born a parlourmaid, exactly. Don't kick my boots off the shelf in the dark—I keep 'em there greased in case I should ever have a use for 'em again, though it ain't likely. Still, one never knows, does one?"

Marshall made no response. He felt almost dazed by the rapidly succeeding impressions of the day—there was so much of undigested happenings to brood over. Erasmus, it appeared, would talk for the sake of talking, perhaps in joy at meeting men of his own kind again.

"I should have thought Milu's kids would have been round this way to see what you two are like," he remarked, "but we've seen no sign of 'em. Funny little beggars. Tomorrow morning I'll take you round the corner and introduce you to Tari-Hi—he knows you're here, but curiosity ain't a strong point of his. He likes to do things in a dignified way—keeps up a style, as you might say. But he's not a bad old sort, taking him all around. I get on with him all right."

Marshall concluded that he would never stop talking.

CHAPTER IV

AIA

IT was long before Marshall, up on his stone shelf, went to sleep. For a time Whauple, having cadged another of Henry's cigarettes, questioned regarding an England of which Marshall could tell him little; he talked of days at Hurst Park and Epsom and Sandown, of a system of betting which ought to have made him a millionaire and even scared the bookies, of nights in London, what the lights looked like at the corner of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street, of going to the Pavilion the night of the cup-final, and of what they had to eat at one unforgettable dinner at the Savoy. Marshall answered his questions as far as his knowledge permitted, and wondered more and more at this paradox of a man whom Madame Delarey had chosen to come out because he had once been with a trading company in Batavia for a little more than a year.

Of Mah-Eng, evidently, he did not want to talk any more. Tari-Hi would compensate for his reticence on the morrow, it appeared, and he was determined, as long as he kept awake, to talk about England, and racing, and football, and similar pleasures.

He slept at last, and Marshall lay wondering, almost fearing. Whauple, in spite of his eccentricities, had seemed a man of some ingenuity, and he was still here. Why was nobody allowed out from the place? Why was a guard set every night and a watch kept by day? These, and a hundred other questions, kept Marshall staring into the inky darkness of this stone cell for hours; he slept at last, dreamlessly, and wakened to find the doorway of the chamber light—day had come again.

The three of them had a breakfast of meal cakes and goats' milk, which had been brought in before Marshall wakened. There was water for washing, too, and Erasmus rejoiced in the use of the cake of soap which Marshall had treasured and brought through from Sapelung. Over

breakfast, Erasmus had a word with Henry.

"Sleep well?" he inquired, in a friendly way

"Perfectlee, thank you," Henry answered, pleased at the interest in him which the question betrayed.

"You know," Erasmus said, in a confidential way, "you ought to be fitted with a silencer, you ought—some sort of exhaust box. Half the night you was missing on one cylinder, and t'other half was like somebody trying to tune a trombone with a bed key. You got adenoids, by any chance?"

"I have no knowledge of your reference," Henry answered, with an air of offended dignity.

"Well," Erasmus concluded, "I think we'll have to fit up a pipe for you to breathe into, to carry the noise outside, or else find somewhere else for you to sleep. This sort of thing is going to break up my nervous system."

"It worried me at first," Marshall put in, seeing that Henry looked scared, "but I soon got used to it."

Henry looked his gratitude for this championship, and the subject dropped. Whauple got up from his bed, on which he had sat to eat, and went toward the doorway.

"Better come and pay your respects to Tari-Hi," he suggested. "He's a decent old bird, though a bit scornful at times."

Marshall followed him out, and Henry came too, keeping close to his leader. Whauple led them on for nearly a quarter of a mile along the curving, narrow terrace, bounded on one side by the river and on the other by the sheer cliff of the hillsides; round the last of the bend the terrace widened to a plateau nearly a quarter of a mile from river to cliff, and more than a mile from where they stood to its far ledge.

It was a scene of wonderful beauty; on the right was the towering hill, its sheer ironstone wall bounding the plateau; between it and the river channel the terrace level carried sufficient depth of soil to admit the growth of trees and flowering shrubs, plantains with giant, glossy leaves, and beds of tropic flowers set in an emerald sward almost as velvety and well-kept as an English lawn.

Across the river an opalescent haze shut in the valley of silent men, and on the far side of the valley, squatly tremendous, the precipitous side of the other hill seemed to float on the mist, rearing up like a great fortification piled by titans' hands. At the farther end of the plateau, which sloped slightly downward from where the three stood, its edge showed as the top of a cliff, and in the far distance threads of water gleamed in the morning sunlight from low-lying, bare country that went away for miles to where the sea, glimmering faintly in the light, looked more of a mirage than a reality.

"It's mighty clear this morning," Erasmus remarked. "Generally there's a haze over the marshes, and you can't see the sea."

"I think it is the most beautiful place I have ever seen," Marshall said, with emphasis.

"Give me a first return to Epsom on Derby morning, and you can take this away for all I care," Erasmus answered, somewhat grimly "Come on—let's find Tari-Hi."

They followed him, keeping close in to the rock wall, and passing doorways in the rock like that which gave access to his sleeping chamber; from near by the river edge two children, pausing in their play among the shrubs, stared at them, but made no move to approach. Halfway across the plateau they came to a 'sort of bamboo settee in the shade of a scarlet-flowering tree that was new to Marshall; here two men and a girl sat, the man in the middle an old, old being, and the other, on the right as they faced the settee, a magnificently proportioned man of middle age, olive-skinned. His face reminded Marshall somewhat of those in Assyrian sculpture, but his features were more finely moulded; he wore a short, square-cut black beard and moustache and his glossy black hair was cut closely to his head, with a perfectly straight edge across the forehead accentuating the serverity of his face.

"That's Drua, in the middle," Whauple explained, before they came within hearing. "The others are Tari-Hi and Aia—three generations all in a row."

THE three seated figures made no move to rise. Whauple, halting before Tari-Hi, raised his right hand and placed it momentarily on his head, in token of salute. Tari-Hi lifted and dropped his hand in acknowledgement, perfunctorily, as if to an inferior rather than an equal.

"Greeting, chief," said Whauple, in the language concerning which he had questioned Marshall's proficiency.

"Greeting, Rasmi," said Tari-Hi, gravely

—the other two on the seat remained as unconcerned, apparently, as if alone together. "These your strangers—how are they named?"

Whauple indicated them separately. "This is Marshall, and this is Henry," he answered. "Marshall would learn of you the story of this place, Mah-Eng."

Tari-Hi turned to Drua and spoke in a language Marshall did not know; the old man—he was a magnificent specimen of extreme old age, with snow-white hair and beard, and bushy eyebrows over sharp beak of a nose—peered first at Marshall and then at Walker, and replied briefly in the—to Marshall—unintelligible tongue.

"Greeting, Mar-shal—and greeting, Henree," said Tari-Hi, accenting the second syllable of each name as he spoke it. "You may live."

"Thanks for permission," Marshall remarked in English, drily.

"They are strange—strange to the law," Whauple told Tari-Hi, hastily. "I have not had time to tell them—they are people of my own land, and we had much to say to each other."

Tari-Hi nodded and looked at Marshall. "It is the law that when strangers come they are brought before the one who rules," he explained gravely, "and at his word they live or die, here or in the silent valley. There have been men bearing arrows with poison tips, and to them the one who rules must decree death."

"We would live here—not in the valley," Marshall said.

Tari-Hi made a gesture of indifference, as if it were all one to him. "In the end you will go to the valley," he prophesied.

"In the end," Marshall answered, "we shall go to our own place."

For the first time Tari-Hi permitted himself to smile, faintly. "If you should attempt escape, you will be driven back, and only my word can spare your lives," he said. "If again you attempt, you will surely die."

Henry made a little moan of fear.

"Why should we be prisoned here?" Marshall expostulated.

"It was not my will that you came—it is not my will that you go," Tari-Hi answered. "Here am I set as a guardian, as a governor—it is the law from the days of Baal Caesar'—thus, to Marshall's ear, he rendered the name—"and if knowledge of this place be spread abroad, I and mine will cease to be."

Marshall shook his head. "No," he answered.

Tari-Hi leaned forward slightly as he sat, and looked more animated. "Stranger from far-off cities," he said, "from the days of my father's father, and from the days of his father—from old days of our governorship—men have come to this place, because of a story that went abroad when one escaped in the far past. And as they come they tell that gold still rules men—they tell of wars and oppression, of capture of cities and the overthrow of kings—the world is in no wise changed since the days when the galleys came to this coast at Baal Caesar's command. Because of the story that went out in ages past, one will come, and another will come, as you and Rasmi have come, and that other who has gone to dwell near his sweetheart in the valley of silent men. If you went forth, for the story you might tell a thousand would come, and there would be an end of my governance—slavery, or death, for me and mine. Were I not merciful, or were there any way of escape for you, I had not said that you might live. Yet thus I say, since Rasmi has asked that you may live, and I have regard for him as a man of wisdom."

"Suffering hambone—he's handing out bouquets, this morning," Whauple muttered.

Marshall considered awhile. "Be it so," he said at last, feeling that guile would be better than open argument. "And now, Tari-Hi, may I learn something of this place—why you are here, shut away from men? Some things Rasmi has told me"—he used Tari-Hi's name for Whauple—"and I would learn more."

Again Tari-Hi smiled slightly. "There are many days, many years, Mar-shal, unless you go down to the valley," he answered. "In the hour before sunset we will speak again."

At the implied dismissal, Whauple placed his hand on his head again, and half turned, as a hint to Marshall to come away.

They went, Henry following, down to the farther edge of the plateau, where a breast-high stone wall formed barrier, and made a continuation of the sheer hillside, which went down for some fifty feet, smoothly precipitous. Away to the left the river tumbled in a straight fall to a rocky pool, a sort of miniature lake with jagged edges of stone showing above its surface, to mark the impossibility of a dive; from the far side of this pool the water drained away to the marshes in a network of channels. Beyond the lower

slopes of the hill it was a wet, malarious-looking land, apparently but little above sea level, and made up of morasses cut in all directions by sluggish watercourses—a tract of undrained, tropical fen.

"I've always thought it odd there's no bush," Whauple reflected aloud. "You'd think the jungle would have covered in country like that."

Marshall remembered the salt pan he had crossed with Henry, and did not answer. He thought of Clement Delarey whom he had not yet seen, of Stephanie, whom he had married so inconsequently, away in England, of his sister and her husband up in the same civilization of Golders Green—Golders Green! Was that life all a dream, or was Mah-Eng a fantastic nightmare from which he must eventually waken?

"I want to see Clement," he said abruptly.

"Yes," Whauple commented, "you would. I'll tell Milu to ask him to come up from the valley to-morrow—you can have a talk to him then!"

He took them round the plateau, showed them where a bridge of bamboo poles, spanning the river, led down to the valley beyond, and pointed out again the white-flowering beds of the strange shrub, showing faintly through the haze which, he said, always lay over the valley in daytime, except in the rainy season. All the time Marshall's gaze roved round incessantly in search of a way of escape, but to all appearances the trap that held them was flawless, unless men could get up the river beside which they had come down.

"Supposing—we might get the better of Tari-Hi, and get away before he could get loose," he suggested.

Whauple shook his head. "Any attempt would bring 'em swarming up out of the valley—the lookout would give the alarm," he answered. "I thought of it—wondered if I could dose Tari-Hi and his people with the ground glass the Chink wanted to use on me—but you'd have to dose the silent men down in the valley as well. The guarding of the place is so well down that it's practically automatic."

"Why did they let us in, then?" Marshall asked.

"If they'd driven you back—if anyone got back after coming so far—they'd take back news of the place," Whauple explained. "Better let 'em in and keep 'em, or kill 'em, according to what they are—visitors ain't plentiful, exactly, anyhow. Man, they've had it planned out for ages, and Tari-Hi's no fool, as you'll soon see."

"But why—what's the reason in it all?" Marshall persisted, almost angrily.

"Tari-Hi can tell you, better than I can," Whauple said. "It's a yarn—such a yarn as I never heard before—he's a sort of guardian here, as he said, and so was old Drua, and his father, and their fathers before them further back than I'd like to count. You'd better hear it from Tari-Hi—you're better educated than I am, and may be able to make something of it. I can't."

"Probably an interesting story to take back," Marshall said, thoughtfully.

Whauple looked at him as if about to speak, but changed his mind. After all, he thought, Marshall would learn soon enough—let him cherish the delusion while it lasted. He, Whauple, had cherished it, and known the bitterness that came when he was forced to forego the hope of escape. He still kept his boots greased and ready on the shelf in his sleeping room, as proof that hope never entirely dies in the human heart, but those boots were a symbol of a miracle rather than of something in which he believed as a possibility.

"And what is Milu in this scheme of things?" Marshall asked.

"Milu—he's a sort of pale echo of Tari-Hi—there's always two families up here, in case anything should happen to the head man," Whauple said. "If Aia don't marry, Milu's boy will succeed Tari-Hi—Aia was the girl with Tari-Hi on the seat."

Marshall, talking to Tari-Hi, had observed her.

WHEN THE heat of the day had begun to wane, Marshall set Henry to the task of washing shirts and socks, to keep his hands employed and his mind occupied, and bade him regard Whauple as temporary mentor while he himself went to talk with Tari-Hi. Henry was very reluctant to part from his chief, even for this little time, but he accepted Whauple as substitute after a little persuasion, and Whauple promised to "lam him round," if he neglected his work.

Out on the plateau, Marshall paused; the wonderful beauty of this place, so incongruous with the story Whauple had told and with the incidents of the journey from Sapelung, appealed to him anew; he found himself wondering what Stephanie would think of such a scene—would it appeal to her as to him? She had the sense of beauty, he judged, capacity for understanding and appreciation of such a spot

as this—odd that she should come drifting into his thoughts from half a world away, at such a moment . . . .

He went on till he came in sight of the bamboo settee; of Drua there was no sign, but Tari-Hi and Aia sat as if neither had moved since he stood before them in the morning. Now, remembering Whauple's mention of her, he observed Aia as he approached the two.

He would have said, had she been of his own nationality, that she was in her early twenties, but he knew that, quickly as the women of tropical races mature, she might not have reached her twentieth year. Her finely moulded features proclaimed her Tari-Hi's daughter at a first glance, and her hair, more purely black, even, than her father's and glossier than any raven's wing, was held back from her forehead by a narrow band of beaten gold, caught in by a gold clasp at the nape of her neck that Phidias might have chiselled, and thence fell behind her, a lustrous night of glory, to well below the waist of her grey linen robe.

But, though many women would have bartered their souls for her wonderful hair, it was in her eyes that Aia had her chief strength; they were long-lashed, so deep a brown that pupil and iris were barely distinguishable, sad in repose as a winter's dawn, yet capable of depths of laughter and illimitable tenderness, and lighted by an old wisdom that left her no less young for its presence. There was a faint tinge of colour in the olive of her cheeks—she had the complexion of a Murillo portrait, but Murillo had been a greater master with such a model as this. It seemed to Marshall as he saw her that, if beauty were symbol of rank among women, then was she empress of the world.

And, facing Aia and her father, stood six feet of the best of English manhood, lean, broad-shouldered, clean-eyed, shaven and groomed as a man should be. Tari-Hi seemed to regard him speculatively, appraisingly, as if he were part of a purpose rather than a man, and Aia's wonderful eyes lighted from sadness to interest.

"Greeting, chief," said Marshall, making no move to salute as Whauple had done. "I come to you to learn, as promised when we spoke together."

Tari-Hi inclined his head gravely. "Greeting, Mar-shal," he answered. "We have but now talked of you. Sit here with us—there is a breeze from the lower lands that cools this place and makes speech flow."

For a moment Marshall hesitated, looking at Aia. "Is it your will, daughter of a chief?" he asked.

She smiled at him with her eyes, and the light in them was such as he had never dreamed. "It is my father's wish, thus mine," she answered.

He sat down between the two. They were semi-savage man and woman in a forgotten corner of the East, reason said, yet for the minute he felt awkward and self-conscious as might a raw schoolboy under the scrutiny of courtiers. It was only the amazing beauty of Aia that impressed him; there was, too, a regal dignity about Tari-Hi, as if he sat above the petty passions of the world, a great man and wise. Then, momentarily, Marshall wondered how he could have stood before Aia in the morning and turned away without noting such a one.

"What would you know, Mar-shal?" Tari-Hi asked courteously.

"Many things," he answered. "As this—how comes it that you, holding no intercourse with the people beyond this valley, speak a language that I know?"

"It is in that tongue they whisper in the valley of silent men," Tari-Hi answered.

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"For once, in a time that I know only by record, a plague destroyed all but a few of our people in the valley, and the one who ruled then in my place tempted the people of this land in, lest the guarding of Mah-Eng should fail. Thus we who rule learned that language."

"Then who are your own people?" Marshall pursued.

For awhile Tari-Hi did not answer. Marshall looked at him and saw that he gazed, half-smiling, toward the lower end of the plateau. Then he spoke again.

"For a moment I called on memory—and what is memory as men know it, but the nearer fringe of a vesture woven by countless lives? In spirit I saw the galleys of Baal Caesar grounding on the far-off shore. My people? The people Baal Caesar ruled, the nation that made the world tremble at its conquests, and built cities to challenge the ages with their glory. Kings bowed to the dust before the kings of my people, and the plain of Dura shook with the trampling of the hosts when the armies went out to war."

His sonorous panegyric ended, and Marshall sat silent. Back into his mind came half-forgotten fragments from the scripture lessons of his school days. "Set up a golden image . . . ." "Belshazzar gave a feast to a thousand of his lords . . . ." "And that night was Belshazzar slain. . . ." Something like that, they ran—he wished he could remember more. Belshazzar—Baal Caesar—

"There was a wall about the city, a great wall with towers—" Almost unconsciously he spoke the words aloud: "And there were gardens built on terraces for the queen, because the city was in a flat plain, and she loved the hills—"

"They were the hills of her childhood—" Aia took up the story exultingly. "You have seen our city, and the galleys will come again!"

More than ever he felt himself in a fantastic dream. The centuries lay thick as the accreted soil over the ruins of that city, he knew, yet here in this forgotten corner of the world a hope of its enduring had lasted since Titus sacked Jerusalem, since Antony gave the world for Cleopatra's smile, since the wars of the Maccabees and the singing of Judith's song. He felt afraid to speak and shatter that long-cherished hope.

"Peace, Aia," said Tari-Hi solemnly, "for the city is dust and its glory forgotten, as are we—have we not read it in the stars?"

Marshall felt vaguely relieved. "It is truth," he said. "Babylon had fallen before the birth of Christ."

"Christ, Mar-shal—who was Christ?" Tari-Hi asked.

Marshall lifted his topee as he answered —"The King of all the world, and of more than the world."

FOR A time they were silent again, while the sun fell behind the hill and shadows crept across the plateau toward them.

"Men of your colour have ome—they came in the time of Drua my father, in the time of his father—for three hundred years there is record of their coming, and they have told many tales of the world beyond this valley," Tari-Hi said, slowly. "In the end they had gone mad, or died, or married among our people, here and in the valley—two of them are among my own ancestors, having learned the wisdom in which we govern here. But there is no record of three—four—in so short a time as you last four strangers have come in. Why do you come, Mar-shal?"

To search for the one who has gone down to the valley," Marshall answered, frankly.

"So he — Rasmi — answered when I asked," Tari-Hi reflected. "Was that one, then, a king, or a king's son?"

"No," Marshall answered, "but inheritor of great wealth—much gold."

Tari-Hi laughed softly, satirically. "Gold will bring men like you on such a quest—gold will do all things, still—and yet you think to go out from the valley!"

Marshall looked at him, puzzled. "Why?" he asked. "What of it?"

Tari-Hi indicated the hill behind him. "That rock is based on gold," he said. "Baal Caesar's galleys and the galleys of the kings before him came to this coast to bear away gold. The guard over the valley was set to protect the gold that slaves brought out from the tunnels under the rock, up to the days of Baal Caesar's rule. From those days onward, though the galleys come no more, the guard is kept, ruled by the governor whose ancestor was set here at great Baal Caesar's command."

"Does Whauple—does Rasmi know of this?" Marshall inquired.

"When I would have told him as I have told you, he could not understand, and thus I did not speak of the purpose of the guarding," Tari-Hi answered. "For on the face of every man is set a seal, and the imprint on the seal is of much or of little

knowledge, marking the high man from the low. Rasmi is a clever artificer, a man of some wisdom too, yet had he never heard of my people and their great city. Knowledge, Mar-shal, and not gold nor possessions, is the seal of rank, the testing stone on which the metal of manhood is proved, and you are of those who know. This I saw when first you stood before me."

Embarrassed by the compliment, Marshall looked down at his feet, and up at Aia. He saw her slow, friendly smile, and smiled in return.

"I would know more," he answered Tari-Hi at last. "Since you know that the galleys will come no more, and Babylon the city has passed with its people forever, why guard this valley?"

Tari-Hi smiled at the question. "The purpose of a king doest not always die with the king," he said. "First must you know how the guard was set, and then you will understand how it is that it still endures, though the first cause of its setting has passed. From the beginning of time, from the ages before my people were a nation, men won gold from under this hill, for in all ages, Mar-shal, has this metal been the whip under which the world cowers, the builder of cities and creator of kings.

A race that was in the world's youth cut these chambers in the rock, tunnelled down to the veins under the hill where the metal is hid. In their conquests my people won this place, but since it was far from cities and from the pleasures that the master metal will buy, the men set to guard its treasure fled, time after time. Then in the days of the great king, Baal Caesar's father, the wise men of that time bade the king cause to be planted in the valley the tree of sleep. By that tree and the power of the tree is a guard chained here, they and their children, while the hill and the valley endure.

"And your people made the channel of the river?" Marshall asked. "Lifted it up to flow above the valley?"

"No," said Tari-Hi. "The river was lifted along the face of the hill by the people who first hewed for gold, that they might have water at hand to wash out the gold when they had ground the rock to powder in the great mill they made."

Marshall thought it over; so far the story, borne out by the channel of the river and the presence of that infernal shrub, rang true.

"But—the governors," he pointed out. "The guard may be chained to the place forever by the tree of sleep, but you—you are not silent? You are free to go?"

"No more free than they, if the wish were mine," Tari-Hi answered. "For when the tree of sleep was planted in the valley, there was set over the guard of that time one of those who served about the king in our great city, a loyal man to whom might be given a great trust, as was this. In unbroken line I descend from that one, as Milu descends from his companion. Here was he given command, and there was laid on him the oath that no man may break, so framed that from generation to generation father should cause son to swear, the oath anew, to rule in this valley and hold it inviolate from age to age—thus do I say that not always must the purpose of a king die with the king. In my youth I swore the oath before Drua my father—thus Milu swore, thus Milu's son will swear, and Aia here and Aia's children in their turn. For though my people is no more a people, yet is the oath, sworn in hearing of the god I may not name, changeless as the purpose of a god, and of more power than the tree in the valley."

"YET," Marshall asked, "the purpose of the guard being gone, and thus the purpose of your oath, what if you broke it?"

Tari-Hi's smile was almost indulgent. "The purpose gone?" he echoed. "While the valley remains inviolate I am as a king. Were it thrown open to the world I should be thrust aside, a slave."

"Yet one might think otherwise, some time, desire to see the world beyond this valley," Marshall suggested.

Tari-Hi's smile vanished. "Even if there were will, there is no choice," he said. "From generation to generation the knowledge of the men of old has been handed on, each governor made initiate in the wisdom that is above the power of kings. If there should come one who thought to disregard his trust, in the day that he forsook his charge he would be smitten, and die."

Marshall looked at him with a hint of incredulity, and Tari-Hi returned the look, steadily.

"Think," he said. "The seal of knowledge is in your face, and the faint impress of wisdom that is more than knowledge. Must I tell you that the eternal powers who rule the world, by whose grace we breathe and move, are stronger than mere men? And if a man should

pledge his life to a task, before the eternal powers, and break his pledge, think you that they would let that perjured life go on?"

The forceful query required no answer. After a silence. Tari-Hi smiled again.

"You have questioned, and I have answered," he said, "but you will yet ask more of our ways. It may be that you will talk with Drua my father, and with Aia from whom I hide nothing. Between us we may cause you to be as ourselves, free of desire for the world beyond Mah-Eng."

Marshall glanced at Aia. "I sit between beauty and wisdom," he said, "and thus can ask no more."

Aia's laugh came like soft music. "There is a wit that is born of wisdom, Mar-shal," she said, "and in it is the beauty of wisdom at play. When you would learn, you shall ask of Drua and of my father, and when you would consider and weigh their teaching, you may ask of me."

He went back to Whauple and Henry slowly, puzzling not so much over the problem of escape as over Aia, a polished, self-possessed beauty with no teaching beyond what Drua and her father could give her, an impossibility in such a place as this. Yet, Marshall reflected, Tari-Hi, like his ancestors before him, had all of life for study and expansion of the knowledge that came to him, and he had proved himself a man of more than common intelligence, as Whauple had implied.

Tari-Hi was proud of his descent, he had no distractions apart from the one easy purpose of his life, and probably there had come to him, together with the tremendous oath of which he had spoken, much of the ancient knowledge of Babylonia, a highly civilized country. Again, there was the fact that adventurers had dribbled in here from time to time, never to escape again, but to spend their years infusing fresh blood and fresh knowledge among the inhabitants of the plateau. Yet, even so, Aia was an impossibility.

But then, he reflected, all women were impossibilities.

He talked with Whauple in an absent-minded way. Henry had been discovered by Milu's two children, who regarded him as a playmate and rejoiced in his notice of them. They had thrown one of the socks he had been washing into the river, and Henry, who was like a fish in water, had dived for it and then sat in the sun for his clothes to dry—Whauple had feared lest he should dive with the cigarette tin in his pocket, but Henry had left it on the bank, together with other valuables.

This was Whauple's news, small chatter of a life that had in it no great happenings, since he had been prisoned in Mah-Eng. Then he wanted to know how Marshall had fared with Tari-Hi: Marshall roused from his abstraction to say that Tari-Hi had told him much, and had promised to tell him more.

"Did you see Drua, or Aia?" Whauple asked.

"Aia was there for a time," Marshall prevaricated, "but she had very little to say to me. I was talking to Tari-Hi."

"H'm!" said Whauple, meditatively. "Clever old bird, Tari-Hi."

He made no other comment, but regarded Marshall speculatively, appraisingly, with just such an expression as Tari-Hi had had in gazing at him. There were the beginnings of a smile about Whauple's face, and he half-opened his lips as if to say more, but thought better of it.

"Clever old bird," he repeated, at last.

WAKENING in the morning after his talk with Tari-Hi, Marshall first wanted to shout to Bob to find out why the early tea had not arrived; he wanted to swear, too, at the steam roller which was making such an infernal row in the road in front of the house. Then he realized that Bob was beyond shouting distance, and that the steam roller was Henry, who still slept vigorously. Erasmus had already beaten a retreat: his bed on the floor was unoccupied.

Recalling the events of yesterday one by one, Marshall came to the conclusion that the problem of escape might wait awhile before he turned his full energies to solving it, though of course he would neglect no chance that offered. In less than three weeks from leaving Sapelung he had attained the chief purpose of his mission—found Clement. Another week here, or a fortnight, would make little difference to any plan of escape, and meanwhile he wanted to know more of what Tari-Hi could tell, see more of Tari-Hi, and of Aia. To know more of this wisdom of theirs, learn just what Tari-Hi meant by the "eternal powers" of which he had spoken. Those powers must be tremendous, to render the oath of guardianship inviolate for more than twenty centuries—it was an unparalleled loyalty to a trust, an incredible thing, view it how one would.

And there was the valley—of what na-

ture was the life of the silent men down there? If he could not take Clement back —and even of that he was not sure, yet— he must learn how Clement fared before he himself returned. He must have some evidence of Clement to take with him.

What wonderful eyes Aia had!

Henry's snoring ceased; Whauple came in, beaming delightedly, with a six-pounder fish carried by its tail. "Lazy beggars!" he shouted. "Sit up and rub your eyes— fish and chips for breakfast!"

"Fish," Marshall agreed, dropping down to the floor.

And chips—yam chips," Erasmus insisted.

Marshall went out for a dip in the river, and by the time he had dressed found that Erasmus himself had cooked his catch on a fire that he made outside the rock chamber, and was justly proud of his achievements.

"It was a bad day for the Savoy kitchens when I took to office work," he declared. "If I'd gone in for cookery there'd have been some excitement about a dinner."

"Did you fix up for Clement to come and see us?" Marshall asked.

"Aye, aye, sir," Erasmus answered—he seemed in exceptionally good spirits— "he'll salute the quarter deck some time in the afternoon. But there's a special matinee for your benefit, first—Milu told me about it. Some time this morning there's to be a practice turn-out to repel overboarders—something like a fire drill on board ship, only different. The lookout man is going to be told to lam his gong."

"By Tari-Hi's order?" Marshall asked.

"Milu's order," Whauple corrected. "Tari-Hi is lord high boss, sitting round and looking important, but Milu's responsible for the detail work—sort of quartermaster and shop steward and general manager. Tari-Hi would play Helen with Milu if anything went wrong in the political economy here, and maybe dock something off his pay at the end of the week, but Milu gets the little jobs done."

"Does Mr. Milu get paid, then?" Henry asked.

"Bless your innocent young heart, I was using a *fashion de parlour* as we say in France," Whauple explained. Milu is quite a nice little man, though a bit henpecked. I rather guess Mrs. Milu combs his hair for him when he comes back late from the club."

Henry looked as if he wanted to inquire about that club, but did not venture. They went outside, and Whauple regarded the ashes of his cooking fire and suggested that, if Henry chose to give him another cigarette there and then, it would save using the automatic lighter—economy, he insisted, was a virtue he had always believed in.

Henry produced his tin. "There are onlee five left," he said, dubiously.

Whauple regarded him anxiously. "Young feller," he said, "did you mean to say you come here with no more cigarettes than that?"

"I have three more tins—fiftee each," Henry explained, hastily.

"Hide 'em—hide 'em where I won't be tempted from my natural honesty," Whauple advised. "Meanwhile, we can practise economy when they're all smoked —let's have one now."

It amused Marshall to see the play of expressions on Henry's face. Taking all things seriously, as he did, he was an ideal subject for leg-pulling, and Whauple's paradoxical doctrine of economy left him yearning for an explanation of the matter. But Whauple saw no need to explain, and Henry had to group this with other mysteries of life.

Milu, rather similar in type to Tari-Hi, joined them by the river bank; he was younger than Tari-Hi, smaller in build, and lacking his air of dignified repose— he seemed to Marshall rather a preoccupied being. With him came a boy of ten and a girl a year or two younger, and the two of them seized on Henry and demanded to see the contents of his pockets again— the photograph of his young ladee, which he had rescued from the silver-mounted frame, was an especially fascinating item. It was all so simple and natural that— except for the difference in language— Marshall felt the scene would have lost nothing by transference to an English countryside.

"I would go a little way toward the barrier," Milu said, when Whauple had informally introduced him to Marshall. "The watcher will signal soon, and I would see what comes of it."

The barrier, Marshall concluded, was the rock incline above which the landcrabs lived. They had barely started in that direction before a deep, booming note rang out from the hill above them, like the noise of a mighty drum beaten persistently. Then a score yards or so in front of the crab's domain, a tremendous crash deafened them as a great boulder, rolled down the hill, shattered into thousands of flying fragments on the terrace floor—

it was deadly as a shell would have been, for any who might have attempted to pass that way. A second followed it, and at the crash Henry seemed inclined to bolt for cover; the fragments of rock sang through the air like shrapnel bullets, and as this second missile dropped Milu raised his arm as a signal, so that no more followed it.

Then, on the far side of the river, they saw men running swiftly up from the valley, armed with spears and bows and arrows; these men went to a point on the opposite side of the river, some way beyond the crab haunt, and halted, each of them with an arrow on his string, looking at the river. It was a very good exposition of discipline, Marshall thought as he watched them.

"Last time they had this pantomime, I was principal boy," Whauple remarked. "It's pretty easy to see why I chucked my hand in—the salary wasn't good enough for the part, with those little pebbles dropping at the rate of about one a minute. One splinter came near enough to save me the price of a hair-cut if I hadn't ducked."

"Where is that look-out man posted?" Marshall asked.

"I'm innocent," Erasmus answered. "He's up there somewhere, but where he is and how he gets there is one of things I can't find out—Milu just smiles when I ask him—and I've watched to try and see them post him, times out of number. There's a sort of ledge they go along to take goat entrails and things like that to feed the crabs—it's a coaly sack, but the beggar ain't there. He's somewhere higher up than that. I've done my damndest to find out about him—no use."

MILU, evidently satisfied that all was well here, went back along the course of the river, and the three followed him, Henry with a child hanging on to each hand. At intervals of about a hundred yards were groups of archers in position, all with arrows on the string, and keenly watchful, though by this time they must have known it was a practice call. They were clad in rough, coarse grey linen stuff; most of them looked little different from the ordinary natives of the islands, though the average of colour was lighter; here and there was a face of the type of Milu and Tari-Hi, and on the whole, Marshall thought, they looked as if the average of intelligence were higher than among the natives of the islands with whom he had come in contact. He saw the thickening of the throat, as if muscles under the jaw were badly swollen, of which Whauple had told him as a result of living in the valley, under the influence of the tree of sleep.

They went on to the wall which bounded the lower edge of the plateau from the cataract of the river to the hillside, and here again were groups of archers posted, looking out over the wall to the lower slopes of the hill. Milu passed along slowly, inspecting the men, and, having completed his round, he raised his right arm full stretch above his head as a signal. Two notes boomed forth from the drum-like gong, and Marshall saw that the archers began to file toward the bridge which led from the plateau down to their valley.

Quite suddenly the full significance of this scene came to him. Anyone might come in to the valley, so long as they did not rouse the crabs too soon, but he saw now that Whauple's greased boots on the shelf were a symbol rather than a definite preparation—the chances of escape were about one in a thousand, or less. And the idea was perfect as a defensive measure; had the guardians of the valley set themselves to keep intruders out, the chances were a hundred to one that they would have been attacked and overpowered long before this time; but to let in anyone who chose to come, and make the valley a place of fear by the series of disappearances that came of keeping each visitor a prisoner, was certain defence until some resolute party of explorers should come, capable of overcoming resistance by the silent men. Even then such a party would need to be armed with some authority for the slaughter that it would cause in effecting exit. The present inhabitants had the right of perpetual occupation, and they were a harmless race, save for this trick by which they preserved their isolation.

Milu turned toward Marshall and Whauple, smiling pleasantly. "All is well," he said, "I will go now to report to Tari-Hi."

Whauple gazed at his retreating back. "Go and be damned to you!" he soliloquised. "Chucking your blasted efficiency at us like that is merely stacking insult on a bale of injury."

"It was not done without purpose," Marshall remarked. Suddenly he felt a very definite respect for the wisdom of Tari-Hi; this gesture—for it was that—was splendidly effective, beautifully convincing; it was the perfection of menace, subtly veiled, yet visible through the veil. They might hold occasional parades of this

kind, but it was no coincidence that one should follow so speedily on his arrival with Henry.

Rage took him suddenly, black, murderous rage; had he come on Tari-Hi at that moment, he felt that he could have killed the man without compunction. That a plausible savage should dare to hold civilized men against their will in this nightmare of a place! Its beauty was devilish, its existence a horror, its governing plant a thing that had seeded in hell, as Whauple said. His hand went to his belt, rested on his revolver butt, and he looked ahead for some sign of Tari-Hi that he might demand instant freedom, or threaten punishment for this tremendous indignity. The fit passed, leaving him wondering at his own folly, while Erasmus still prattled, cheerfully beside him; not thus would they win a way of escape.

"Whauple"—he interrupted a reminiscence of a dead-heat at Kempton, when Erasmus had backed both horses and been welshed—"there's one way out of this place—only one, that I can see."

Erasmus pointed toward the sky. "But I'd rather live, even here," he objected. "The fishing ain't bad sport."

Marshall smiled; Whauple's cheery outlook was tonic in its effect. "Two ways, then," he amended.

"Put yours down on the floor and let's look at it," Whauple said.

"Bribery," Marshall said.

And what in hell are you going to bribe with?" Erasmus asked, in disgust. "Opera tickets, or Sheffield plate?"

"There is more than one form of bribery," Marshall answered. "This may take time. Henry has made friends with Milu's children, and Milu knows the way to the look-out post. If we go carefully—even if we have to wait a few months for the boy to get interested and pass his knowledge on to Henry—we mustn't appear too interested in him ourselves, to make Milu suspect that we're getting at him—"

"It's a dog's chance," Erasmus said, thoughtfully. "Meanwhile the sun is beginning to hit me where the turkey's wattle blooms—we will seek repose till the chauffeur brings the car round for our afternoon drive."

He walked on, musing. "And there ain't no look-out at night—it's struck me there must be a way down the hill from the other side somewhere. But the times I've tried to find out how that look-out gets posted up there—"

He wagged his black beard doubtfully. "If that kid knows, or can get to know, we must go carefully with Henry, so he don't give the show away and spoil it by seeming too eager."

When they reached his doorway, he was still thinking over the problem. "Anyhow, it's something to make me go on keeping my boots greased," he concluded.

Marshall paused in the doorway. "There's one thing I was thinking over last night," he said. "You told me the scent of the shrub in the valley did all the damage. Supposing a wind blew that scent up here—what about us?"

"It can't," Whauple answered. "The wind is nearly always from the west, straight down the valley—an east wind will sweep straight up. A north wind hits this cliff up over us and eddies down on us and back to south, and a south wind blows the scent straight away. Oh, it's all planned nicely, don't you fret! They know their job, and the trade union rate and hours for it."

He went within the chamber. "You're new—new and restless, like I was," he said. "But if Henry can get round that boy—there's plenty of time, of course."

Henry, having shaken off Milu's children, entered.

"How's trade in cigarettes, Henry?" Whauple asked, pleasantly.

"The shop will reopen this evening for a strictlee limited period," Henry answered, with firmness.

"You're coming on," Erasmus observed. "Quite a gift for repartee."

Henry maintained his firm attitude on the subject.

"Flatteree is of no avail," he said, and climbed to his shelf.

Well," said Erasmus, as a parting shot, "hold one in your mouth while you're asleep. You'll make less noise breathing through your nose."

IN MID-AFTERNOON, while Marshall cleaned his gun and Erasmus told Henry of the joys of an English racecourse, there came toward them as they sat round Whauple's doorway a tall, thin youth—he was twenty-five, but looked no more than twenty—whom Marshall recognised instantly from his knowledge of Stephanie as Clement Delarey. He was dressed in the grey linen waist-cloth and robe of the silent men they had seen that morning; his face, Marshall saw as he came near, lacked the firmness and in some degree the fineness that marked Stephanie and made

her more than normally attractive; his lower lip drooped loosely, and there was a carelessness about his way of walking and an attitude as a whole that made Marshall vaguely dislike him—until he smiled. He looked presentable enough then, and rather handsome.

"Hullo, Clement," Whauple greeted him. "Seems a long while since you were up for word with me—I got Milu to ask you to come up—want to introduce you to my friend and a fellow-worker, Marshall. He's sprung the mouse trap, same as us."

Clement turned to Marshall and held out his hand—"I suppose I ought not to say I am glad to see you."

Although Whauple had given Marshall warning of what to expect, it came as a shock to him to hear the words whispered, with obvious effort. It was a husky, wheezing attempt at speech, and now Marshall saw and noted the curious swelling under the jaw, like knotted muscles following the line of the bone. He was utterly at a loss for reply; he gave Clement's hand a firm grip, smiled a response. "Let's sit down a bit," he suggested, lamely.

Whauple beckoned Henry away, and left the two to talk together undisturbed, each on one of his three-legged stools. Or rather, he left one to talk and one to whisper.

For a time they sat silent, Marshall vaguely embarrassed, Clement thoughtful, perhaps reminiscently so.

"My mother is well?" he asked at last.

"Quite, when I left," Marshall answered. "Rather anxious about you, of course."

Clement nodded. "It was not until Whauple came and told me of my inheritance that I went down to the valley, to breathe the scent of the tree of sleep," he explained, still in that terrible, grating whisper. He dragged his stool quite close to Marshall. "It is easier so," he said. "You will forgive the disability?" His smile was boyishly winning.

"My dear chap, I wish I could tell you how sorry I am," Marshall answered.

Clement laughed, soundlessly, and to Marshall that was most horrible, a ghastly, inhuman travesty of laughter.

"Do not be sorry—I am not," he urged. "For all you want in this life you must pay a price. I have got value in happiness—the price was my voice—nothing more."

Marshall could not answer; it seemed to him that Clement, having taken an irrevocable step, tried to persuade himself of its wisdom.

"Let me tell you," the whisper went on. "I came, as perhaps you know, to clear my father's name, earn money to pay his debts. My cousin heard first of my inheritance, and kept the knowledge from me—in place of telling me, he sent me here with the story of great fortune to be won, that he might inherit from me—from what my mother told Whauple of how my uncle left the money, it is only if I die that Pierre inherits from me. Here I am as dead, and he had but to wait. I do not doubt that he knows the truth of this place."

"He knows it all right," Marshall agreed.

"I trusted him, and I came. For two years and more, alone here, I dreamed of escape and grieved at the strain on my father's memory. Then Whauple followed me, and when he told me of the inheritance, I knew I need grieve no more, for the debt would be paid by my mother. Already I had met Marie—her own name was difficult and not pretty to see when I wrote it down, and thus I have named her Marie, and because it is my name for her she loves it. She is a daughter of one of the head men in the valley."

"And you married her," Marshall commented, acidly.

Clement gazed at him as if he doubted the intention behind that comment. "I was two years here alone," he whispered, with a certain fierce insistence. "I saw Whauple try to escape, knew the impossibility of escape—wait till you have been here two years. Marie meant love, companionship, tenderness, all a beautiful loving girl can give. The choice was before me—to drag out my years here on the terrace as you are, in lonely imprisonment, or to give my voice for all that she could give to make the valley a place of life, instead of living death. I gave my voice—what have you to say?"

"May God pity Pierre Delarey when he comes within reach of my hands," Marshall said, solemnly.

Again Clement gave vent to that soundless ghastly laugh. "He is in another world—this is another world, as surely as if we had died and gone to heaven—or a hell, as it was without Marie. You can no more go back to Pierre's world than I can. The difference between us is that you do not admit the finality of your state—you value your voice, too, perhaps. I—I have Marie."

Save for the one question, it seemed that he had forgotten his mother, and all the things of the life he had left behind. Realizing his state, Marshall refrained from reminding him.

"You have seen Tari-Hi?" Clement whispered, changing the subject abruptly. Marshall nodded.

"And Aia?" His gaze was curiously intent as he asked this second question, and it struck Marshall that the silent men in their valley might be inclined to gossip among themselves over any news or rumor of happenings on the plateau. He evaded direct answer.

"Tari-Hi told me of the tremendous length of time his people have governed here—it's a fine example of loyalty to a chimera."

But Clement made a derisive little gesture. "Tari-Hi is here because he cannot get away," he answered. "It is more than law here that nobody shall ever leave the valley. The silent men—it would be death in about forty-eight hours for any one of them—of us—to leave, to go beyond the scent of our lotos tree, and every man in the silent valley knows that the only protection for us is rigid imprisonment for all on the plateau. If one got out and spoke of the gold here—has Tari-Hi told you of the gold?"

"A little," Marshall said. "No particulars, only the fact."

"Well, the way the silent men understand it is that if this were known outside, they would all be killed—they picture the outside world from what they know of it, a place of savages and cannibals and men with poisoned arrows, and a few roving white men—the sort that has drifted in here a few times—with a thirst for gold. They cannot even begin to believe there is such a place as Sapelung, or any form of civilization outside their valley. And they would not let Tari-Hi go out any more than he would let you go out—if he could. That is why Tari-Hi and Milu remain. The strength of this place is its utter silence."

"I don't think Tari-Hi wishes to go," Marshall suggested.

"But his predecessors may have wished," Clement whispered, and smiled. "If they did, it was not loyalty that held them back, but fear, and the knowledge that it was impossible to go."

For awhile they did not speak. Then Marshall offered a cigarette, and Clement shook his head.

"The taste is dead," he declared. "If you had lived in the scent of our lotos, you would never smoke again."

"What is it like?" Marshall asked, really curious for the opinion of one who had experienced its effects.

"Indescribable," Clement whispered. "The scent of all the flowers of paradise, eternally fresh and beautiful—worth the loss of a voice."

MARSHALL felt irritated, that one should praise a thing so terrible. "And the valley—are there many in it—what is it like?"

"About two thousand, men and women and children—probably more. Five head men govern it. We grow yams, and a sort of millet they grind into meal for cakes, and plantains grow themselves—my clothes are plantain fibre—and there are fruits and other things. Herds of goats, but no other large animals. It is a simple, easy life—all that I miss in it is my books—have you any books?"

Marshall shook his head. Henry's testament was all the printed matter they had brought with them.

"Perhaps it is well," Clement commented. "To read would but create the desire to read. There are times when I know old needs, old thoughts, forget—"

The whisper fell to silence, and there was in the pause something indescribably pathetic. There were times, Marshall understood, when this youth felt that he had given not only his voice, but his birthright, for the affection the girl in the valley could give. In a certain way he had left hope behind when he made his decision and went down to her, and in that descent, by his renunciation, he had sinned against his name and the traditions of his fathers; in his inmost heart he must feel the crime.

"The urge of youth"—the whisper went on again—"the call of young to young—'I have need of you.' And the loneliness—to live up here alone and dream of her, waiting—"

Had he never dreamed of his mother, waiting too? Marshall questioned to himself. It seemed that Clement divined the query, though. "If there had been one faint hope of escape, I might have done differently—I do not know. But we are here for life—why not down there, if it means happiness?"

Marshall realized the uselessness of argument, and refrained from it. "Is that—the effect of the plant—quite incurable?" he asked.

"Quite," Clement answered. "I was to have been a surgeon—I made a partial dissection in the valley when a woman died. She was quite young and healthy—it was snake bite, a very rare thing among

us, for there are hardly any snakes in the valley—and Marie's father got the body for me. The para-thyroid gland had disappeared, almost, and other glands were quite atrophied, too—in normal air she could not have lived three days. So with us all, and there is some secretion in the scent of our lotos that compensates—all but the voice. The effect is not constant, for some of them have to chew the leaves at times; and if all were taken away from the scent some would live perhaps three or four days, some only one. It is temmental, different in different individuals. But the voice is always lost—that is the sign that the influence of the tree is complete."

"It is very terrible," Marshall said, gravely.

"Until you smell the wonder of it," Clement whispered. "Then you understand it is very beautiful."

Again Marshall resisted an inclination to argument. He wanted to cry out against this glorification of the horror, but realized the state of the man before him, knew it quite useless to protest.

Clement looked round at the sun. "I will go back, now," he whispered. "The birth of our first child will be soon, and I do not leave Marie alone long at one time, till after that. She is very dear to me. But before I go I would tell you—Whauple asked me to write and sign a statement when I married, in case he should some day escape. It tells how Pierre encouraged and helped me to come here, and other things—there are the names of the Chinese guides. Whauple has it—you may like to know that it exists."

"I am glad to know," Marshall answered, rising as Clement rose to go.

"It is nothing," Clement whispered. "He —and you—are here for life as surely as if you were already silent men But it pleased him—it may please you too. I will go, now—my throat is aching with so much effort at one time. And Marie is waiting—we shall meet again."

"I hope so," Marshall answered, without enthusiasm.

"And I will let you know"—he smiled proudly—"if it is a boy or a girl."

As he tramped off towards the bridge that led down to the valley, Marshall looked after him. "Poor little devil!" he said aloud. After that awful whispering to which he had listened, even the sound of his own voice was good to hear.

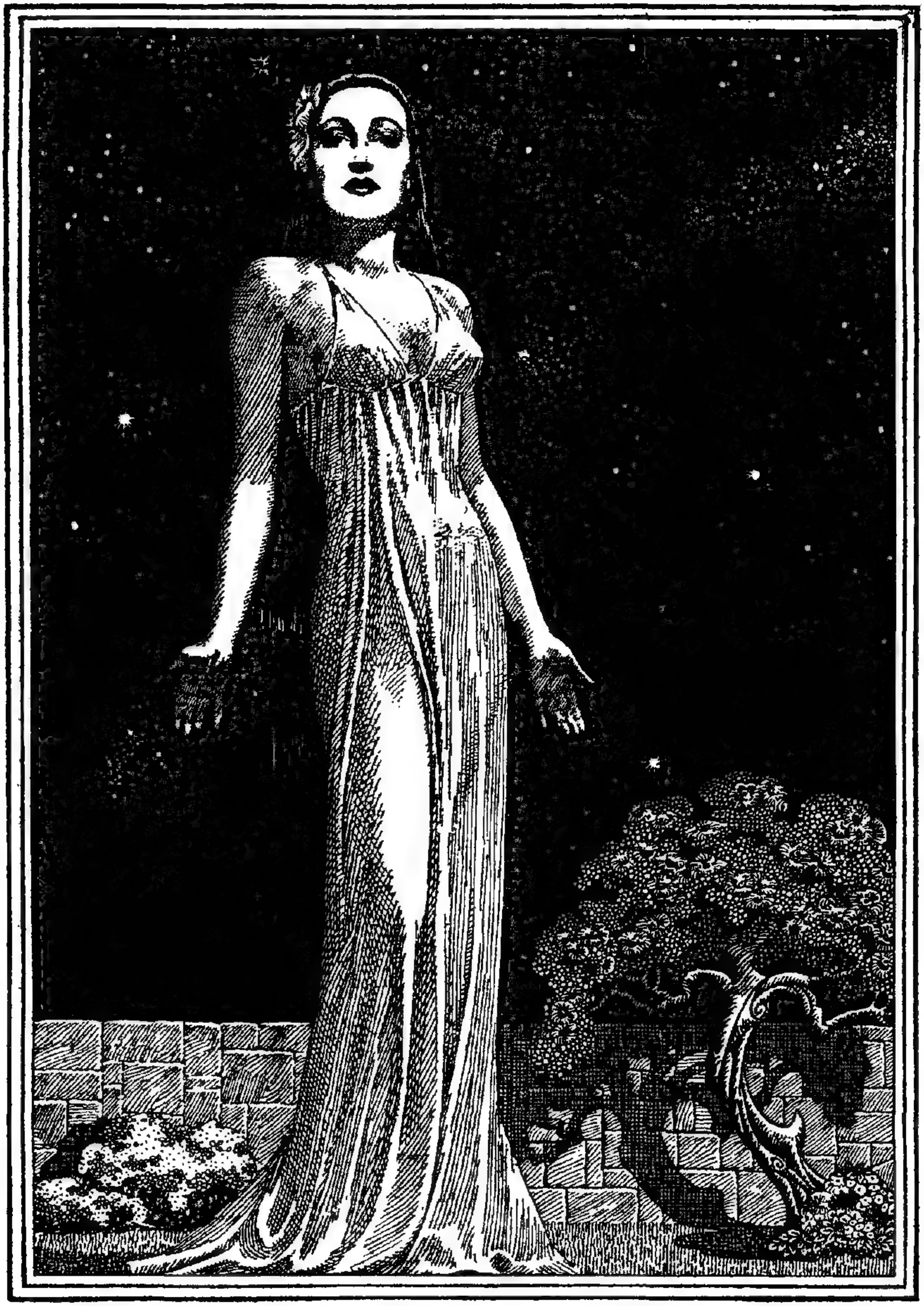
He thought, then, not of Clement, but of the child that would be born to laugh soundlessly as Clement laughed, to whisper with effort as Clement whispered; he thought of it, a helpless baby, trying to arouse its mother's attention by crying, but unable to make a sound. It was so horribly unnatural, so awful a thing that he ceased to feel any pity for Clement, who could commit the crime of bringing such a child offence. What were the words?—"Whosoever shall offend against one of these little ones . . . it were better that a stone were tied round his neck and he were cast into the sea." Clement, self-seeking, had incurred that condenmation, past all question.

The boy—Marshall could not think of him as a man—was still lost in love's young dream, still so engrossed with his Marie that the outer world was of no account. But without any cynicism in the reflection Marshall felt certain that this stage would pass—Clement would waken from his dream to find that in betraying his higher self he had created seven hells and fallen to the lowest. And, in spite of his appearance of youth, in spite of the weakness his face betrayed, he was a man with a man's knowledge; he had done this thing deliberately, open-eyed; with full realization of his loneliness, his temptation, Marshall felt that when the day of his awakening should come he would merit no pity. He had sinned past pity.

He had shown himself full of thought and consideration for this silent girl, who was not even of his own race; for his mother there had been one careless question; for his step-sister, worth a hundred of him, no word. Quite suddenly her cry in the vestibule of the hotel—"I want to be just"—came back to Marshall. She was fine gold, a Delarey, as she had claimed, in truth, and Clement was dross beside her—what was there of justice in his interpretation of life and its purpose?

There was this to be said, Marshall concluded: Clement was piling up his own punishment and in giving himself up to the tree of sleep, turning his back on the outside world for ever, he had rendered that punishiment certain. For if there were to be no escape from the valley, even then it would be possible to live in keeping with the conception of life that was typified—so near was sublime to ridiculous —by Whauple's greased boots on the shelf. Whauple, for all his vulgarisms and oddities, faced his life like a man, rather than fall to the level of mere self-indulgence, as Clement had fallen.

Whauple and Henry came back,



Empress of the world, were beauty given full rule, she smiled—her eyes challenging. . . .

Whauple with his bamboo rod on his shoulder.

"I saw him go—guessed you'd talked him tired," he said. "The fish are tired too—not a blessed nibble. Henry's face scared 'em, perhaps."

"My face is able to withstand criticism," Henry objected.

"Granted, as we say in Balham," Erasmus retorted. "My contention is that the fish ain't able to withstand your face."

He looked at Marshall, questioningly. "What did you think of Clement?" he asked.

Marshall did not answer immediately. He remembered Whauple's reference to the child that had laughed and shouted when he played, and had died. He knew that Whauple's cheery courage would last more than two years, that loneliness would never make him neglect the greased boots on the shelf.

"Whauple," he said at last, very quietly, "I am proud to know you."

"Well," said Erasmus, "the drinks are on me, as usual. What's yours?"

Marshall smiled, and Henry looked puzzled. There was a rather wistful expression on Whauple's face.

"I did my damnedest," he said. "You know—I didn't want him to go down there—it might have been selfish of me, but I tried to keep him from going. You know, it wasn't worth it, not for any girl that was. But there was a yellow streak in him—you've seen him, now, and maybe you know."

CHAPTER V

UNDER THE HILL

THENCEFORTH, when Marshall thought of the fields of sleep, or when Whauple or any other spoke of them, the picture in his mind was that of the silent children, the little ones robbed of half the heritage of childhood. It had been worse, of course, had they been born blind, but apart from that there could be few greater evils than this voicelessness.

He had felt, after his talk with Tari-Hi and Aia, that he wanted to learn more of their history, of the history of the valley, before turning actively to plans of escape, but now he cared nothing about these things, only to get away to normality again. He had seen Clement, Whauple had Clement's signed statement, and there remained nothing but to get away. Obviously the evil of the fields of sleep could not be remedied, save by wiping out the inhabitants of the valley and destroying the trees of sleep—burning or in some way ensuring the destruction of the upas-like plant. It was terrible to think of any people living thus, but still more terrible to think of destroying them in order to put an end to the nightmare of the valley. And, after all, it was not his concern; it was too big a thing for any man to touch, and possibly he was exaggerating its horror. He could not go to the valley to see what the lives of these people were like—nobody could go, without some form of respirator that would prevent breathing the scent of the plant

"We've got to get," he told Whauple the morning after Clement's visit—Whauple had contrived him a rod, and they fished, patiently and unavailingly. "I've had enough of it already, and so have you."

"Plenty, thanks," Whauple answered. "Tell you what—we'll make ourselves parachutes, and float off the wall down at the other end of the terrace—down on to the marshes there."

Marshall stared at him to see if he were serious. "I don't think," he concluded, equably. "It's a hell of a thing to say, but I don't see any way out, unless that kid can give away the look-out post. Henry's with 'em this morning again—I think he knows 'em well enough for us to unfold our dark scheme now, eh?"

Marshall nodded. "He'll be along when we go in," he agreed. "We'll put him on it then. Otherwise—there might be some way of dropping down that cliff."

But Whauple shook his head. "You couldn't do it in the daytime, and it's watched all night and every night," he said. "And if it were possible—you've looked over and seen what the marshes are like. You'd have to come round back out of them, and probably run right into one of the native villages, where they'd make long pig of you in no time, from what I heard of 'em in Sapelung. No, the way out is up the river, the way we all fell in, if there's any way at all—which there ain't, till Henry gets busy on that boy."

"We must make him busy," Marshall agreed. "It's about the only way visible, as you say."

A woman came toward them from the direction of the plateau. "Mrs. Milu," Whauple said. "Wonder what she wants—made a mistake in counting up the laundry this week, probably, and wants to

know what's become of that other dress shirt of mine."

She was tall, and, Marshall judged, had been very nearly as beautiful as Aia in her youth, but there was a frowning, angry expression on her face which spoilt its beauty. The two men rose as she came near them, and turned to face her.

"Mar-shal—this is Mar-shal?" she asked Whauple.

"It is Marshall," he agreed, speaking in the language she used—that in which Tari-Hi and Aia had talked to Marshall.

She made a sort of curtsey to Marshall. "Tari-Hi has asked me to be his messenger," she explained. "He would have you eat with him at sunset, if it pleases you."

"Great articulated hambone!" Whauple murmured.

"You may tell Tari-Hi that I shall come, gladly," Marshall answered, concealing a surprise as great as Whauple had expressed.

"And for myself, I would give you thanks," the woman went on, rather nervously. "The young man your servant is kind to my children, and I am grateful."

"It is pleasure to him to play with them," Marshall assured her, "and you owe me no thanks. I am glad if it is of service to you."

"All things that make them happy are of service to me," she answered. "I will tell Tari-Hi that you will come."

She left them. When her back was turned Whauple laid down his rod, and did a little dance on the river bank.

"Wants him to play with 'em—wants him to—do you get that? Now let's fill him up with the plan, get him to go gently so as to abstract the egg without breaking the shell, and we'll follow that bloke up the hillside one of these fine days and walk out of this little restaurant without leaving a tip for the waiter."

"It begins to look like it," Marshall agreed.

"Say," Erasmus remarked suddenly, "I wish I'd brought a razor with me and kept the fungus off my chops. I ain't half a bad looking chap when my face is clean, and maybe Tari-Hi would have asked me to share his frugal board if he'd seen me in my glad rags."

"What's the idea of this?" Marshall asked.

"He's going to offer you a seat on the board of directors, or maybe get your name on a prospectus to float a new company. When you're fairly in the constitution, get me a knighthood—tell him I'll vote for the government every time, and use all my influence on their side at the next election."

"QUIT fooling," Marshall said, but with a half smile. "Why is he doing it—what is behind it?"

Whauple looked at him reflectively. "You're a modest young man, and maybe you don't see the little game. I think I see it, though."

"Well?" Marshall asked.

"Maybe I'm wrong, but it's worth considering. You may remember Tari-Hi told you that two of his ancestors were men who'd dropped into the valley, some time or other."

Marshall nodded.

"There's two families up here—two that never give in to the tree of sleep. Tari-Hi married a valley woman, and she came up here for Aia to be born. They've got to get fresh blood on the plateau, at times—two families and no more can't go on intermarrying, or else they'll weaken themselves and die out—you see that?"

"It's obvious," Marshall answered.

"Perfectly," Whauple agreed. "Well, Tari-Hi's branch of the government has very nearly died out. There's only Aia—fine girl, Aia. He's got no son to succeed him, and Aia's chance looked like that of marrying a silent man—not to go down into the valley, but for the man to come up here as Tari-Hi's wife came up. It's a pretty unsatisfactory state of affairs for Aia, you must confess, when you think it over."

"Very unsatisfactory, I should think," Marshall agreed.

"Well," Whauple said, "there's you. I told you Tari-Hi was a clever old bird. You're cast for the part of the juvenile lead. Act one, scene one, and the orchestra is just tuning up. The curtain will ring up on a dining table groaning with costly plate and sparkling with priceless old cut glass. Enter Marshall, from the prompt side, and the heroine of the drama looks down bashfully while the heavy father takes the young man by the hand and borrows a fiver off him, as is done in all the best families—"

"Oh, shut up!" Marshall begged.

"Well, there you are. I may have got it wrong in parts, but that's the main plot. When I've had a talk with the limelight man I'll tell you how scene two begins."

"I couldn't refuse to go, I suppose?" Marshall conjectured.

"Don't you be such a damn fool. You

know the game—though I don't believe you'd have seen it if I hadn't told you, being a modest and particularly nice young man, and you can play your hand how you like, but for the love of Mike don't throw it in, or you'll put Tari-Hi's back up. Are you married, by any chance?"

Marshall nodded. "Yes, and no," he answered.

"Well, it doesn't matter, either way, from Tari-Hi's point of view. If you are, your wife ain't likely to come here for week-ends to see what you are doing. Being a fine example of Greek sculpture, as you are, you'll do for Tari-Hi—and for Aia."

"I'm hanged if I will," Marshall retorted energetically.

"We may all be hanged if you won't," Erasmus pointed out. "Anyhow, you'd better play your hand so as not to put Aia's back up—hell hath no fury like a plaintiff in a breach of promise case, and Aia's no Sunday school prize winner that can't melt butter against her teeth—she's fully certificated in a brainy family. If you're going to kick, I don't envy you."

"I'm not going to kick, for all our sakes," Marshall answered. "I'm going to play their game, and lengthen it out till we've settled on our way back—temporise till then."

"And then poor little Calypso will be left chained to her rock while Perseus sails off on the Gorgon's back," Whauple surmised.

The bewildering mixture of classical allusions was too much for Marshall's gravity. Whauple looked at him in an injured way.

"Well, what about it?" he inquired. "I got 'em all out of a book—Haydn's dictionary of dates, I believe it was—when I first left school. It was a scorcher of a yarn—and this sun's a scorcher too. Let's go in and educate Henry—will you coach him, or shall I?"

"Tackle him by all means, if you like," Marshall said.

"I'll enlighten him, then," Whauple promised.

Henry had already sought the cool shelter of Whauple's boudoir, they found; he was sitting quite contentedly on his shelf, with his feet dangling down. So far, the novelty of the valley had kept him from boredom; there was plenty to eat and nothing to do, an ideal existence from his point of view, except for the impossibility of communicating with his young ladee. Silent men, instructed by Milu, kept the beds freshly made, did all the cooking and incidental work with the almost invisible efficiency of aptitude and perfect training, and Henry was in clover, for the time. He would grow tired of clover, of course, but not yet.

"Little job for you, Henry," Whauple announced as they entered.

"I am all ears," Henry answered, complacently.

"So's a mule," Whauple remarked, "but it's a powerful tough job to lam sense into him, generally. You are to act the part of serpent in this paradise, and Milu's boy will be Eve. Provide your own fig leaves, grease paint, and supper beer. Separate dressing rooms, no pay for rehearsals, and no flowers or chocolates may be left at the stage door by admirers."

"I do not understand," Henry said, coldly.

"Which goes to prove my allusion to the mule fully justified, as well as in perfect taste," Eramus commented, in a satisfied way. "Henry, Milu has a son, a promising youth of some ten summers. Before he strikes eleven you've got to make him stop promising and begin to keep his promises."

"Still I do not understand," Henry protested. He looked at Marshall, who, already sitting up on his shelf, let Whauple go on in his own peculiar way.

"There is a look-out man on the hill," Whauple pursued. "When we had that alarm business yesterday, he was the man who handed down those little bouquets from the royal box to the orchestra stalls in front of us—the boulders that put the wind up you, my lad. In order to get on his perch, the look-out man has to climb up the hill. Got that?"

"Perfectlee, thank you," Henry answered.

"Don't thank me—it's a pleasure," Whauple assured him. "Now point your ears forward, so as to catch the draught and keep your brain cool and responsive. We want to climb to that perch, and hop off it on the other side—the Sapelung side. All clear?"

"I am not a fool," Henry said, with scornful complacence.

"For this relief, much thanks—and I'm glad I'm not too old to learn," Whauple retorted cheerfully. "Well, Henry, where the track to the look-out post starts, or how you get on it, is a deep mystery—to us. Milu knows it, of course, for he's got to know it. Milu's boy may know it, and if he don't know, he can easily find out from father."

"Now I understand perfectlee—I will ask the boy," Henry said.

"THE mule wins," Erasmus told him, "and as you're the only other runner there'll be no money to pay out on place betting. Henry, my lad, if you ask the boy they'll put Epsom salts in your early morning tea as surely as cod liver oil is good for smoker's heart. You've only got to ask him once, and our chance of finding that path and getting on to it is gone for evermore, and then some."

"Then what can I do?" Henry inquired, perplexed.

"You can tell that little boy what a nice, kind man his father is, and ask him if he wouldn't like to have a toy drum to beat, something like the look-out man's gong, or drum or sardine tin, or whatever it is. Ask him if he's ever seen it, and then follow up quick by asking him if he's been down among the silent men. Tell him that when his sister grows up you're going to marry her, and he's to come and live with you.

"Butter him, Henry, soft-soap him, keep on asking him all sorts of things about the valley, and telling him what a clever little man he is, and keep in mind all the time that what you want to know is how to get on the path to the look-out post, but never let him think you want to know it. And as sure as cows don't lay eggs he'll let drop all about it, sooner or later. Your job is to be interested to the last degree in this wonderful place that you're never going to leave, and to persuade the boy he's a wonderfully clever little man for being able to tell you so much about it."

"I think I can do it, carefullee," Henry said, thoughtfully. "It is plain now that I was not at first verree circumspect in my projected dutee, but you yourself were verree circumlocutoree."

"If you say so, it's very probably a winner, but my money goes on something with less weight to carry," Erasmus answered. "What I want to pour into your receptive mind is that if Milu's boy gets any idea we want to know about the path, we shall never know. Take your time over it, don't overdo your part—be your natural self and stand up bravely when the gallery chucks orange peel at you—and young Milu will provide us with our return tickets for the first-class Pullman on the Sapelung express, one fine morning. Think it over carefully, for it's a big responsibility we're laying on you. We're trusting to you, Henry, relying on you to get us out of here. Do not let us down, for if you do I will not take you to the picture palace on Saturday afternoon."

Henry thought awhile. "I will now sift the much chaff of your remarks from the verree little meat," he said at last, "and proceed to elaborate a scheme in accordance with the intention."

"Spoken like a lawyer!" said Erasmus, admiringly. He stretched himself on his bed. "Lawyers," he concluded in dreamy soliloquy, "are people who get paid six and eight pence for making three words do the work of one."

* * *

Tari-Hi paced thoughtfully back and forth on the plateau, between the bamboo seat on which Marshall had first seen him and the face of the cliff. Marshall, approaching him as the shadows crept up toward the hill crest on the farther side of the fields of sleep, and seeing him on his feet for the first time, had full opportunity to admire his magnificent proportions and stately dignity; physically, this descendant of a great people was an imposing figure, while he had already given evidence of his mental qualities. He looked gravely at Marshall.

"Greeting, my guest," he said, and "Greeting, chief," said Marshall in reply.

With that exchange Tari-Hi led on to a doorway in the cliff similar to that which gave access to Whauple's chamber. It was characteristic that he said no word of the reason for this invitation, Marshall thought. The invitation itself was a matter of course, said Tari-Hi's manner, a courtesy extended by equal to equal, and a natural corollary of their talk of two days before: it needed no explanation.

Within the doorway, the rock chamber was far different from that which Whauple occupied. It went up full thirty feet from the skin-rugged floor, and was spacious and lighted by candles burning in recesses at intervals in the walls; there were communicating doorways to the other apartments at the sides and back, and in the centre was a table covered with a cloth of gray linen and set with cold meats, the meal cakes of the valley, fruits of various kinds, and flask-like vessels of unglazed red ware, together with sectioned bamboo drinking cups. There were knives, too, not unlike ordinary table knives, but with tapered points—already Marshall was aware that the method of smelting iron was known to this people, who made use of the metal for their implements. Four goatskin-covered couches, one at each side of the table, suggested that Tari-Hi and

his people reclined at their meals in old Roman fashion.

Aia and Drua stood as Marshall followed Tari-Hi through the doorway—the custom of giving the guest precedence was evidently unknown. For a second Marshall was at a loss, but Aia, white-robed, more beautiful than when he had first seen her, he thought, saved the situation. "Welcome, Mar-shal," she said, with a slight inclination of her head, and as he bowed slightly in reply Drua lifted one of the unglazed flasks from the table, poured a few drops from it into one of the bamboo cups, and splashed the liquid on the skin rugs at Marshall's feet. "Welcome, stranger lord," he said.

An awkward silence followed, and Marshall was quite at a loss. Aia's wonderful eyes shone laughter at him. "We wait for the guest to take his place," she told him.

Still he hesitated. Rigid rules of etiquette bound these people, he divined, and he had no wish to transgress.

"How shall I know my place?" he asked. "I am strange to your ways, and need teaching."

"We may not influence your choice, nor sit till you have chosen," she answered. "It is custom, old as our government."

He moved to the skin couch nearest to him, and sat down on it. Aia took the seat on his right side, Tari-Hi faced her, and Drua sat at the far side of the table, facing Marshall.

"The custom came of a poisoned cup," Aia told him. "Since that day, the guest chooses his place before others may sit."

"Many customs endure when the need has passed," he said "In my own land the giver of wine pours first to his own cup, as proof that the wine is safe. It is a rule from old time, like this of yours."

OF ONE thing he felt certain—they had no need to bother about poisoning him, if they wished to rid themselves of him, for they had plenty of more convenient means of disposal at hand. They ate, and to Marshall it was a most excellent meal; no servant appeared, but they helped themselves from the dishes on the table, flat platters of the brick red, unglazed ware. In the flasks was a light and most delicate wine which appealed to Marshall's palate particularly after a long course of water without flavoring.

"You have grapes in the valley," he commented—so far he had been unaware of the fact.

"Many fruits," Tari-Hi told him, "brought by the galleys in old time and planted for our use. Some have died out, and some we have still."

"There were horses, in old time, but they could not endure," Drua added. "The name has become a legend for children, and we know of their form by the carvings in stone in the galleries of the mine and in our temple."

Remembering the prancing steeds of Assyrian sculpture, Marshall judged that their conception of a horse would hardly enable them to recognize the reality. It struck him that he might make use of his time—vivid word-pictures of the outer world might appeal to Tari-Hi and Aia, if not to the old man facing him.

"I have ridden horses, in my own land," he said. "And there are chariots that need no horses, but of themselves carry the rider."

"As a cup may float on water, perhaps," Aia suggested, thoughtfully.

"No, but with wheels," he answered. "You use wheeled vehicles here?"

But they did not, he found. He had to explain, with the help of two round platters and a knife between them to show the principle of the axle which carried the load—they did not know the equivalent word for axle in that language.

"There are wheels like these for winding up the stone of the great mill," Tari-Hi commented, deeply interested in this—to him—new method of transporting goods by means of wheels. In the confined space of the valley, with little need for transport, the use of vehicles had quite died out, ages ago.

"What mill is this?" Marshall asked.

"It was used to crush to powder the stone brought up from the mine, so that the workers might wash away the light dust of the stone and collect the heavier grains of gold that remained," Tari-Hi explained. "A great rock is held in grooves in the wall, and over it are two of these things—wheels—with a shaft between them. A strong rope was passed through a hole in the rock and round the shaft. Men turned the wheels, and so wound the rope on the shaft, lifting the rock to a height. Then pieces of the ore were placed on the bed on which the rock had rested, and when the men released their hold the rock fell, crushing to powder all beneath it, and when they washed away the powder the grains of gold remained."

"Who built this mill—your people?" Marshall asked. Some of this he had been already told, but he wished by apparent

forgetfulness to see if Tari-Hi would tell the same story twice.

Tari-Hi shook his head. "A race that has so long died out that the time between them and my people is far longer than that between my people's coming and this day," he answered. "When the first finders of the mine began their work on it, the valley was a great lake of water. They hewed this terrace on the hillside, and cut the channel of the river along the edge of the terrace, diverting the stream from flowing into the valley, and lifting it to flow as today."

"And the lake—the water in the valley?" Marshall asked, wondering if there were a drainage outlet which might offer means of escape for him.

"In the course of ages the sun licked it up," Tari-Hi answered quietly, "and men planted the valley with corn and fruits. There are little sluices in the rock of the river bed, here one and there one, by which we may let down water to the valley at will."

"A very perfect system of irrigation," Marshall remarked.

"Perfect in truth," said Drua. "The men who cut the channel of the river had skill —their work might well outlast the world."

The old man drew Marshall's attention with every word, for his voice, still strong and sonorous in spite of his great age, was impressive as was his magnificent old face. "Have you, among your own people, works that will thus endure?" he asked.

Marshall thought awhile. "No," he confessed at last, and then wondered if he had done better for himself by lying than by this truth. "Egypt, of old called Khem, had works of equal strength."

"In these things Khem was our master—master of all but that first people," Drua said. "But these later races—we have kept record of all that has been told by strangers coming to the valley—their peoples are poor and small, their works but for a day. Marshall, I have seen the seasons pass as pass the desires of man, and from my seeing and my thought deem the world no wiser for its age—men learn few new lessons, and forget the old."

"It is kinder," Marshall urged, a little amused that this old barbarian should pretend to such knowledge as admitted of his sitting in judgment on the outer world.

Drua smiled, and it was like a winter's sunrise. "Two things, gold and the love for a woman, governed man to action in the dawn of time, and these two are rulers still," he declared. "For the young man, gold or fame, and the power that either may purchase, to lay at a woman's feet. For the man grown wiser, power, which is gold harnessed and driven. These rule—there is no kindness in life, Marshall."

Marshall shook his head, as if to dissent.

"Then tell me of this kindness," Drua bade.

"The world is more careful of life, more thoughtful that all may live to eat and be clothed," Marshall answered.

"To the end that some nation, or some ruler, may have more power," Drua commented. "Mar-shal, the nations rise and pass, each in its turn, but man remains the same—in youth a being of emotion, in the middle years a voice to speak regrets, and in age one to see too late how life might best be lived. For not until the last years may the spirit which is in man rule the desires which hold him back from wisdom."

"Yet," said Aia, "where would be life's beauty without these you call emotions?"

"There spoke the woman," Drua retorted. "Use is beauty, Aia, and beauty that is not use is the snake in the coils of which man is helpless. The beauty of flowing water, the beauty of young children in their growth, the beauty of green corn ripening, of the sun at midday, of rest in presence of a task well done—such things as these lift the world nearer to the power that shaped it and set it on its path. But the glamour of young love may clothe evil with beauty and give it power."

Silent, Aia glanced at Marshall and smiled.

"Had youth's eyes the wisdom of age to guide them, they might pierce beyond the stars," Tari-Hi said, thoughtfully.

"There is more of warmth in the brightness of earth than in the stars' shining," Aia urged.

Drua laughed, and it was like the sound of a 'cello chord. "Ever youth knows, and ever age learns that a lifetime of knowledge takes but to the threshold of wisdom's store," he said. "For the spirit that is in man must kill mere emotion that man may learn, and youth's guide is emotion."

"There are men and men," Marshall put in.

"All men are as grains of dust, clinging to a ball flung from infinity to infinity by an eternal hand," Drua said. "Yet the spirit that is in man, if he will serve it, may lift him to stand and grasp the hand that flung."

"In fellowship with men may a man best serve that spirit," Marshall urged.

DRUA'S keen old eyes looked out at him from under their white-fringed brows. "There spoke youth," he said, "and thus in youth I too dreamed. Fellowship is but as if a man should first chase one firefly in the dusk, and then turn to chase its fellow, for of one interpretation and another is born perplexity. As but now you said, there are men and men, and one will urge this course, one that. My son, Tari-Hi, would say cut back the vine, and Milu would say let it stay unpruned. How am I, hearing both, helped if I ask for grapes?"

The homely, forceful simile made Marshall pause for an answer, and in the pause Drua went on:

"Fellowship? I have watched the young moon grow and the Pleiades swing, and held converse with the Dog Star while it ran from its rising till the world's rim swallowed it. There is more of true fellowship in these than in the speech of men, for in self-knowledge and self-rule is set the key to wisdom's door. In these my last days I would call back the years that I might use them in the service of the powers that shape mankind, and were a man to arise thus minded in his youth, he might call on the hills to follow him and harness the winds of heaven to mould the walls of his cities from the unheeded dust."

"Thus would you return to the pursuit of power, that is gold harnessed and driven," Marshall quoted him against himself.

Drua shook his head. "Not so," he said, "for such a one might set himself to the carving of a step on which all men might stand, the breadth of that step lifted from their ungoverned selves. Dethrone avarice and the thought to kill for gain or enslave for the sake of gold, and then such care as goes to the guarding of this our valley might be turned to use and the beauty that is in use. Mar-shal, I have lived through and past desire, to that place where life is service rather than self, and the walls bounding time turn to crystal, giving sight of worlds to come."

"And these worlds—what are they?" Marshall asked.

"Service," Drua answered, with solemnity. "Death is a gateway to use, and so to beauty. On this side the perplexities of man's passions, which cannot pass with him through the gate. The spirit alone may pass, erect or crippled, as passions have ruled or served in life."

"Yet is that just?" Marshall asked. "For to different men different opportunities, varying passions. There are men and men."

"Yet it is just," Drua affirmed. "There are men and men, but to each at birth is given will. As the will is used is government strong or weak, and the hand that weighed the child to birth holds a balance with which to weigh the shaped spirit in the gateway of life, that we call death."

He coughed, poured himself a draught of wine from one of the flasks on the table, and drank.

"Age is garrulous, and wearying at times, Mar-shal," he said, almost apologetically. "When I am wiser, I shall tell more in fewer words. Turn now to talk with youth, for I would rest."

Marshall rose as the old man stood to go. For a few seconds the four of them stood, and then Drua came close to Marshall and looked into his eyes.

"I speak," he said, "as I have but now spoken, seeing in you one who has lived to make desire serve rather than rule. Guest of our valley against your will, remember that we are servants, even as they in the valley of silence are our servants, and in remembering think that we hold you as one with us, nor of our free will hold you against your own."

"Fairly spoken, Drua," Marshall answered, "and such a night as this of your speaking might make me forget the desire to go."

Drua raised his hand in gesture of parting. "We shall meet again," he said, and, turning away, went through one of the communicating doorways to his own place.* Marshall looked at his wrist watch, and felt no longer surprised that Drua had chosen to retire: three hours had passed since he entered, while they ate and the old man talked.

"What is that you wear?" Aia asked curiously.

"A mechanism—a tool for measuring time," he answered, and began to unfasten the strap of the watch.

* Marshall admits that his rendering of this conversation with Drua gives but a faint picture of the old man's powers of expression and poetic imagery. "I longed for a shorthand writer to take him down—listening to him was a wonderful experience," he said. He noted particularly the simile of the world as a ball flung through space, as denoting some considerable knowledge of the principles of astronomy. This was further exemplified by sentences which, though vividly impressive at the time, did not remain in his mind—owing to the difficulties of translation to English added to the imperfections of unaided memory—clearly enough for subsequent transcription.—The Author.

"You shall show me its wonders tomorrow," she said, with a little laugh. "For if you question the flight of time, it is proof that we have talked enough—and if we weary you now, we shall not tempt you to come to us again."

"If such a night as this could weary me, then neither beauty nor use would have power over me," he said. And with that he took his leave.

"I DON'T for a minute believe we're in here for life—we shall find a way out yet," Marshall remarked as they sat talking while Whauple fished, the next day.

Erasmus lifted his rod and ascertained that the bait was still on his ingenious bone hook. "I thought it was about time I greased my boots again," he agreed. "If only these people knew how to draw steel wire, we could make some real hooks and catch some fish, instead of just fishing."

"Funny, but not useful," Whauple commented, acidly. "There's a limit to that theory about the small boy with the bent pin beating good tackle. Bone hooks are the limit. When we get out, I'm going to buy some fish-hooks as soon as I get sober again."

"Pierre Delarey, before anything," Marshall advised gravely. "We will set a straight course for Government House at Sapelung."

Whauple shook his head. "Evidence first," he contradicted. "We've got to leave Clement here, pending a doctor coming here to examine him and see if there's any hope of curing the effects of that devil plant. Once we get out, there'll soon be a clear road in. Clement's given us the names of both Pierre's Chink guides, and if they'll give him away for planning my murder—"

"They may give more, properly handled," Marshall suggested. "You remember there were two men before you, Benson and Pernaud?"

"Nothing in it," Whauple declared. "Benson went away somewhere, and Pernaud got lost altogether."

"Pierre bought Benson—he's in Java still," Marshall said. "Pernaud is generally supposed to have come out on this trail and died somewhere in the unmapped jungle.

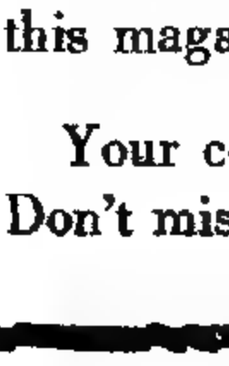
"That means a Chinese guide, probably one of the two whose names Clement put down for us, for Pierre would use the same men if they were available—and Pernaud died of the ground glass that you escaped, or else the knife."

"But the guide wouldn't confess to murder, and there's no evidence but his own confession," Whauple urged. "You can threaten and do what you you like to make him confess, but no Chink is afraid of death."

"No," Marshall agreed, "but he's desperately afraid of ever being buried outside China."

"But you've got to kill him before you can bury him outside China," Whauple expostulated.

"Quite so," Marshal agreed again.



ON THE NEWSSTANDS!

BETWEEN WORLDS

By Garret Smith

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"Hence—get both the Chink guides found and interrogated properly by a trained interpreter. Point out to each of them, separately, that he'll be hanged, and as a convicted criminal will forfeit his right of having his body taken back to China, unless he gives evidence against his fellow Chink and against Pierre for procuring him to murder Pernaud. Between the two of them we'll get near enough to the truth to deal with Pierre."

Whauple looked at him admiringly. "If I had a brain like yours, I'd have found a way out of this damn place before now," he said.

Marshall shook his head. "More than one brain went to the making of this prison," he declared. "There is a way out, of course—there's a remedy for every trouble on earth, if you only think long enough."

"Go on thinking—don't mind me," Erasmus advised. "Henry may hand over the key of the back door, if you don't think with a whiz."

"I hope he does," Marshall said.

"Damn these fish!" Erasmus cried out suddenly. "They sling their hook as soon as they see ours. I want a change from cold goat *à la* silent valley. Eggs and bacon, or kippers—Lord, what a bust I'll have when we get out!"

"Pierre first," Marshall warned him.

"No," he contradicted. "Get out of here, first. Funny thing, but all my life I've been wishing myself somewhere else, except when the winner went past the post with my money on him and I was watching on the stand, or when the 'Spurs won the cup. Life's a hell of a funny business, between drinks."

"How old are you?" Marshall asked—there was no impertinence in the question, for he had already told Whauple his own age.

"Forty-two—old enough to know better. The night before Clement's mother fixed me up to come here I dreamed of a white cat, and even then I wouldn't take warning."

"What does it mean to dream of a white cat, then?" Marshall asked, curiously.

Whauple caught a fish. "Great hambone!"

He almost shrieked the last word as he pulled out a flapping, struggling three-pounder and dropped it on the rock bank. "We'll put him in water to keep him alive till tonight, and you can go and feed with Tari-Hi if you want to. No dining out for me!"

"Look here, Whauple," Marshall said, when the fish was ready for transport. "You see what it's like there on the other side of the river?"

Whauple nodded. From the depths of the valley, perhaps a hundred feet below the rock aqueduct which carried the stream, the ground rose up in the direction of the pass by which they had entered the valley; opposite to them it might have been thirty feet below the level of the terrace on which they sat, but beyond the crab haunt it was higher than the stream.

"It's broken ground, I know," Marshall went on, "but why shouldn't we drop into the valley one fine night by means of that bamboo bridge, come up along the other side of the river, and just walk out?"

Erasmus shook his head. "Firstly, the bridge is guarded at night," he answered. "Nextly, they've got the equivalent of the crab guard over on the other side—big red woolly spiders fed on meat and kept at their posts, just as the crabs are, by feeding. You remember when they had that practice alarm, the archers ran up alongside the river and then stopped, some way up stream?"

"I remember—I wondered why they stopped."

"Spiders," Erasmus answered. "You might get through 'em in daylight, with your legs leather cased and going in a careful hurry, but at night, over that broken ground—it would be a more horrible death than among the crabs. There was never a trap like this in the world before. You couldn't move in daylight without starting the look-out man's gong, and at night every way's safe."

Marshall mused awhile. "It's lucky they're friendly," he said. "I wonder why they don't kill off visitors and save this trouble."

"Milu told me months ago," Whauple answered. "It's a tiny settlement, and they welcome fresh blood—up to a point. These occasional strangers dropping in to tea help to keep up a healthy stock, and there're not enough to be a danger."

"I wonder the race has not died out," Marshall observed.

Whauple shook his head. "Other way round," he said. "Their danger is overpopulation, and a possible too many to feed."

BACK at the entrance to his chamber, he revived his fish by dropping it in a vessel of water; it was of the same species

as the one he had caught for breakfast before, short and broad-bodied, and striped almost like a mackerel, though with less vividly contrasting shades. Henry came and gloated over it, with a memory of how Whauple had cooked its predecessor.

"Cruel young beggar!" Erasmus soliloquised. "He'll stand and watch a lovely thing like that swim round, and think of nothing but a streak off the forequarter."

"Do not you too think of eating it?" Henry asked, with some annoyance in his tone.

"I caught him," Erasmus answered, complacently.

"And what difference is that?" Henry asked.

"Climb up on your little shelf and keep cool," Erasmus advised. "The difference may not be apparent to your beautiful eyes, but I can see it. You may have great personal charm, Henry, but you'll never be a really outstanding figure in politics or commerce—you think too much about your little tummy."

An hour or so earlier than usual, Marshall dropped off his shelf.

"Where are you going now?" Erasmus inquired.

"To call on Tari-Hi," Marshall answered.

"Well, perhaps," Erasmus commented. "It's playing their game for 'em in a way, but the more they think you're in love with the place—the place, I said—the less they'll suspect us of looking for ways out."

Marshall went out. A light breeze came up from the east, but the heat of the day was still intense; walking easily, he wished he had brought some books, or that he had some means of relieving the deadly monotony that threatened to supervene when the resources of the plateau itself were exhausted. More than ever he wondered at Clement, who had limited his life still more by going down to the valley of silent men—what would life be for Clement when the first flush of his love dream had faded out? And there had been no necessity, that Marshal could see; Clement, young though he was, had plenty of intelligence; he might have become intimate with these people up here—why had not Tari-Hi seen in him a match for Aia? He was presentable enough, rather young for the part, perhaps, but certainly not younger than Aia herself. Mutual antipathy, perhaps. . . .

Musing, he came on Aia, seated alone on the bamboo settee. She looked up at him and smiled, and again her wonderful beauty made him almost afraid—surely no woman had ever owned such eyes as these, or such hair as the radiant darkness which fell about this woman's form.

"I hoped for this," she said frankly, "and so came to this place, away from my father. Is it custom in your country to take no heed of a woman when men are there?"

Marshall smiled amusedly—it was quite true that he had given her little attention, so far. "It is in the woman's hands," he said. "Yet when age speaks, it is for youth to listen, surely."

"Hence I came to see if you would find me alone," Aia responded, and laughed.

Coquetry did not exist for her, he realized. The circumstances of her life, the absence of men near her own age, precluded its birth, even. He felt a little afraid of where her utter frankness might lead, especially if—as seemed very probable—Whauple were right, and she looked on him as her future husband independently of any feeling she might have in the matter.

"Thus I have found you," he answered, playing for safety.

"It is a great honour," Aia answered with a touch of irony, "for you have left a man of your own race to seek me."

"Yet a man of my own race left the one whom I have left, to go down among the silent ones," he pointed out.

"You have seen him—the one who went to the valley," she affirmed—it was not a question.

"He came—two days since," Marshall said.

"If you had seen the woman who called him to her, you would understand," Aia told him. "Our valley has never known such a one."

"There was one here who might have held him from the valley," Marshall suggested, curious as to why Tari-Hi had not encouraged Clement to become his son-in-law.

"I have beauty," Aia said calmly, "as I know when I see women from the valley. Had I chosen to use it, as I could, I might have held him from sight of her—but I did not choose. And when he had seen her—I say that I have beauty, even great beauty, but to look on her face is as if one dreamed in the fragrance of the flower of the tree of sleep."

Marshall shook his head. "Such beauty as yours is past all that I have seen," he said, "and that any other should excel it is not to be believed."

She laughed, well pleased, and he thought that if her utter frankness led

her to this cool, impersonal view of herself and of him, in which she could talk easily of things that are more dangerous for reticence, then it was to be welcomed. It was obvious that, whatever might be the truth with regard to the girl of the valley and her charms, Aia had never given Clement a second thought—and probably Tari-Hi had not attempted to coerce her.

"The sun creeps round on us," she remarked. "I thought, last night, that my father's talk of the mill and of how they washed the powdered rock for gold had interest for you. If you would see the mill—it is cool, under the rock."

He rose at once—the proposal was quite acceptable. Aia led him past Tari-Hi's doorway and down toward the eastern end of the plateau, stopping where an elliptical crack in the hillside separated a portion of the rock from the mass.

"Here your strength must serve," she said. "The barrier may be pushed inward, and a balanced stone in the floor will hold it back till we return."

Marshall set his shoulder to the rock which the curving crack separated from the bulk around it; though it was tons in weight, it was so nicely based on stone rollers that it went back slowly at the pressure he exerted—Aia placed her dainty hands on it and pushed beside him. When the mass had rolled back some four feet, a loose lump of rock in a recess of the floor—a sort of see-saw with its heavier end held up until the stone door was rolled back off it—clicked up and formed a stop to hold the door open.

Stepping to one side of this unique door, which was about Marshall's own height and nearly four feet in width—a mighty weight to move so easily—they stood in a great dim chamber, so high that darkness hid its roof.

"The mill is here, at the side," Aia said. "Here are candles, if you have fire like that I have seen Rasmi use, to light them."

She took two thick candles from a ledge; Marshall took out his waterproof match case, and she came quite close to him to watch him getting a light.

"Do you not fear?" he asked.

"I have seen this done," she answered, "and why should I fear you?"

He struck a match and lighted both candles, taking one from her to inspect the "mill" of which Tari-Hi had told him.

IT WAS a cube of solid rock, with faces about eight feet square, bound with heavy bars of bronze that had been eaten to sponginess by slow corrosion, and with a thick bronze base. Through a great eye of the same metal at the top had been passed a cable thicker than any that Marshall had seen before; most of it had rotted away, but a few inches remained threaded through the bronze eye, so fragile that a touch would have made it crumble to dust.

Some twenty feet up above the rock, which was tongued to fit shallow grooves extending up the sides of the recess that framed it, were the rotten remains of what had once been a heavy wooden windlass, with recessed platforms at each end for the men who had turned it. They had wound up the rock press and then let it fall back, crushing the quartz placed under its face.

Pieces of this quartz still lay before the stamp. Marshall picked up one, and saw its veined richness—it carried a higher percentage of gold than any ore he had ever seen, he judged, as far as this cursory inspection permitted of judgment.

"Where was the layer of rock from which this was taken?" he asked Aia, who stood, watching him with an enigmatic expression on her beautiful face.

She pointed toward the darkness at the back of the chamber. "There," she said. "The roof falls until such a man as you must bend, and the walls close in to a passage so narrow that two cannot pass each other. Steps go down until you come to water—the mine is flooded, so that its galleries cannot be reached. The air is foul, but a man may go down the passage till he has come to fifty steps and descended them all, and at that level he will come to the water."

Fifty steps, he calculated, would take one about down to the level of the marshes, if, as she implied, the passageway sloped down before it became steep enough to render the cutting of steps necessary. If this mine were to be worked—as it would be some day—it would cost something for a pumping plant.

"Here is gold such as the galleys came to take," Aia said, "the last that was ever crushed in the mill."

She moved to the side of the chamber opposite to the primitive stamp or "mill." In a little cell was a heap of rotted rags, among which metallic dust gleamed yellow in the candle light. Marshall stooped down and picked up a waxen seal bearing a cuneiform device on its impressed side. "They placed the gold in little bags, and sealed each bag with that seal," Aia ex-

plained. "These bags were placed here, sealed and ready, but the galleys came no more."

So Tari-Hi's incredible story of galleys sent by Babylonian kings was true, after all! Such a thing as this seal might have been a forgery, had there been any reason for forging it, but the gold dust—a hundredweight of it, perhaps—was real, and the rotted tatters of the closely woven linen bags were real, as was the gigantic bronze-bound stamp with its crumbled rope and windlass.

The arms that had laboured at the windlass were dust, and the very names of the overseers who had weighed the gold and sealed the bags were forgotten. The people who had first worked the mine and built the stamp were no more than a legend, so old as to be almost out of recorded time, their very existence forgotten by all but these dwellers among their works.

"You dream, Mar-shal," Aia suggested, watching his face by the light of the candle she held.

"I thought of Drua's words, of what this metal is to man," he answered. "For such work as is here were lives spent like cups of water, and they who spent have passed, even out of memory, kings and slaves alike."

"They lived," she answered. "They had their sorrow and their happiness, and if they have passed out of memory yet they have left their impress on the world. We are very little things, Mar-shal, but—to each a task, and in the task its reward."

"Is there more to see?" he asked.

She made a negative gesture. "Only the rock sluice cut along the river brink, where they washed their gold," she answered. "If we go out to the garden, it will be cooler now."

Marshall extinguished the candles and put them back on the ledge from which Aia had taken them. Then, putting his shoulder to the sliding door, he pressed it back so as to take its weight off the balancing stone which acted as a stop to hold it open; he depressed the stop with his foot, and the great rock, impelled by its own weight, slid over it and rolled forward as easily and silently as if it ran on oiled bearings. Marshall blinked in the light—it was near on sunset.

"It was little to see," Aia said. "Some day you may wish to go down the stairway to the water, to see how the passage ways were hewn. It is free to you to enter when you will."

Was there another place in the world, he wondered, where a hundredweight of virgin gold might lie without a single bolt to guard it? But then, there were more than bolts guarding this place.

"Since the galleries of the mine are flooded, I have no wish to enter again," he said. "Aia, now I have seen this rock closing the entrance, will you tell me—your guard at the valley entrance sends down great boulders at will—how can he move them so swiftly at need?"

"There are many boulders to his hand," she answered, "each held in place much as this door is held back by the stone beneath it, and so rounded that they will roll and fall swiftly. When they grow few, our people from the valley go up the hill and hew others to shape, placing them in readiness to send down at need."

So that was that, he thought—no chance of exhausting the look-out man's store of stone ammunition. Aia divined his thought.

"Guest of ours," she said, with a sort of gentle compassion that touched him in spite of himself, "cease to question the guarding of our valley. If you could fight and kill half of those who live here, enough would remain to hold you. To your own people you are dead."

It was said, he realized, not as warning, nor as threat, but as cold, stark fact. For the first time he felt a little thrill of fear, lest she might speak truth.

"Aia," he said, earnestly, "if you were prisoned from all you know and from all who know you, would you not think of ways of return?"

"Yet we know you," she reminded him.

He did not answer the half-appeal. Never having seen the outer world, she could not realize its multitudinous interests, its changeful fascination and eternal call from scene to scene. The stream of life flowed, for her, placidly and monotonously as the river in its hewn bed, and that river would as soon change its course as her way of living would change.

She came quite close to him. "Mar-shal," she said, almost timidly, "you must go hence, now. Tonight is my night of watching before the altar in our temple—tomorrow I take the oath of guardianship before Drua and my father."

"Binding you to the valley," he commented.

"Not more surely than I am already bound," she answered. "Yet is it a great ordeal, the initiation that awaits me. I would have you—if you will—come to me at sunset tomorrow, that we may walk

here together, and in some measure my weakness may lean on your strength."

"I will come," he answered—no alternative answer was possible.

For the first time Aia hesitated, seemed at a loss for words. "Milu's daughter—when such a day shall come for her—she has a brother," she said, disjointedly. "The thoughts of tomorrow—the thoughts such a day in my life must bring—I could not speak them to my father. I ask of you, for I am alone."

"I will come," he answered—no alternative again.

She smiled her gratitude, as easily and free from embarrassment as if in truth he had been her brother. Her glorious eyes were unlighted beyond friendship, steady in their regard—if Tari-Hi had planned, Marshall felt certain, then, that Aia had been no party to the plan. Though she had wit enough for scheme and plot, yet the frank honesty of that gaze was beyond any scheming woman's contriving.

He went back thoughtful, wondering—each day brought some new impression, some cause for change of view. Once, years before, Victor Marshall had fallen in love, and the girl had jilted him within a month of their marriage-day for another man, and made him cynical where women were concerned. As he had told Stephanie Delarey, he was not afraid of falling in love again, but Stephanie Marshall had shaken his complacence on the point, though she had not quite destroyed it. And now Aia—

Then he laughed at himself. Indeed, as Whauple had said, Tari-Hi was a clever old bird.

"Just in time," said Whauple, busy cooking his fish by his doorway, while Henry, standing to leeward of the fire, luxuriated in the smell. "Had a good time?"

"Excellent, thanks," Marshall answered.

"Pree-cisely," Erasmus commented. "It would rejoice the heart of our friend Tari-Hi to hear you express yourself so."

CHAPTER VI

COLD FLAME

WHEN the fish had gone its destined way, and the brief dusk had given place to darkness before the coming of the moon, Marshall sat outside the entrance to Whauple's chamber on one of Whauple's three-legged stools, and mused on Aia and the day's events. As Whauple would have expressed it, she left him guessing; her attitude was so utterly at variance with Whauple's suggestion regarding her and Tari-Hi's intent.

He came to the conclusion, first, that Tari-Hi had made no definite plan, but trusted to propinquity and the normal course of events to make her fall in love with him, and him with her—perhaps he had suggested to her that Clement was a possible mate for her, and by the suggestion had prevented that solution of her future; if so, he would be wise enough to refrain from such a suggestion with regard to Marshall, and would leave her to take her own way.

Then, over the phrase "fall in love" Marshall questioned his own conclusion, and from questioning came to understand—and through it to see Aia more clearly—that she would never "fall in love" with anyone. It seemed to him that her life, her lack of association with men of her own age, or with women who might act as rivals, made that impossible, for he judged that in her case the attraction of the sexes would fit itself to circumstances, and under these circumstances there was no need for "falling."

Sitting there, he told himself that nature never implants a desire, nor admits a sudden impulse, without definite cause. He considered the process known as "falling in love," and saw it as in reality a sudden desire to grasp and hold, in view of possible loss to a rival interest; the man or woman subject to that process would be actuated by fear of loss, and thus would not stay to assess the real qualities and worth of the one desired, but, obeying a natural prompting, would try to seize and hold before the prize could be carried away by others.

In Aia's case he concluded that such a state did not obtain; she was without rival, and knew it; to the knowledge might be added the instinct by which every woman is aware that her indifference is her greatest charm, in the early stages of mutual attraction, for the man she would attract—for a man values his conquest in proportion to the difficulties attending on it. Not that Aia would reason these things out, but they would be instinctive knowledge, needing no reasoning, and probably never given a thought. She had all the years before her, Marshall must inevitably come to her in the end, unless he were more or less than human, and thus the impulse to "fall" in love would not exist—there was no necessity for it.

So, thinking the matter out as he sat, reasoning it definitely, almost coldly, he

saw it. He was not in the least in love with her, then, and yet she made a very definite appeal to him. He could not have expressed the feeling she aroused in him more clearly—these fine shades of emotion are beyond language. He thought of Aia taken from this lonely place and set among other women—among men, too; she would cause a sensation. . . .

He went inside. Whauple had been examining Henry on the day's doings, and more especially on his task of learning the way to the look-out post. It appeared that Henry was progressing satisfactorily—there was every possibility that Milu's boy might let fall the desired information, from what Henry had to tell, and in the meantime Henry himself was still having a good time. Mrs. Milly, as he called her, liked him for his notice of the children—there was good reason, then, why she would wish them off her hands—and Milu himself was inclined to bestow a smile on Henry when he saw him. "He is of great dignitee," Henry said, "but he is verree nice man, Mr. Milu."

They talked, desultorily, in the darkness. Marshall remarked on the absence of lights of any kind, bearing in mind Tari-Hi's stock of candles. "He offered me candles," Whauple said, "but I told him I didn't want them. The football edition of the evening paper always gets delivered before dark, and all the books in the library are small print—what's the good, anyhow?"

"One might as well be in the dark as the light, really," Marshall answered, "except that you might want to do something—"

"Part your hair straight or see that the hot water bottle don't leak," Whauple suggested, "or do fretwork, or post up the sales in the ledger. What would you want to do, anyhow?"

"Admire you in a reclining posture, Mr. Whauple," Henry put it.

"I told you he was getting a gift at repartee," Whauple remarked apparently to Marshall. "He'll be wanting his salary raised, soon."

"When is the rainy season here, Whauple?" Marshall asked, abruptly changing the subject.

"About a couple of months ended," Erasmus answered. "It came down, too—there were patches of the fields of sleep flooded, and I thought it would wash the crabs down here."

"It was a clever idea, that of the crabs," Marshall remarked.

"Clever? Don't mention it!" Whauple answered. "These people know their job, as I told you."

"They had to get something to keep out savages, when that crab guard was first set," Marshall went on reflectively. "They hadn't to worry about people like us. If they'd tried establishing any sort of wild animals up there, it would have been impossible, and useless too, for the fiercest leopard that ever sprung is finished when a poisoned arrow hits it. But the crabs—"

"They'd just laugh at having their backs tickled when the arrows began to fly," Erasmus completed. "Same like with the spiders—what's the good of trying to shoot off the spiders—waste of ammunition every way you figure! Oh, they're a smart little bunch, here!"

"The more you think of them, the more it's apparent," Marshall agreed. "The only possible weakness in the scheme would come of slackness on the part of the look-out man, or the guard at night."

"But then they don't need to guard for outsiders—only for insiders," Erasmus pointed out. "That makes it easier—and when a man comes up out of the valley to do his bit, he knows quite well he's responsible for the safety of the whole crowd—from their point of view. And when you reckon that none of 'em can stay away from their tree of sleep for more than twenty-four hours before beginning to suffer from it, you can guess the hours are easy even if the pay isn't much."

They were silent for a while. "Found a way out, yet?" Whauple asked suddenly.

"Several," Marshall answered, ironically. "It's so easy."

"We may get a brilliant idea in our sleep."

Marshall took the hint, and dreamed of a medley of crabs and woolly red spiders, all snapping at bone fish-hooks and running over the football editions of evening papers which rustled and crackled and even groaned—until he wakened and found that Henry was, as usual, snoring.

MORNING brought a queer little procession of men from the valley, bearing sundry articles which turned out to be skin-covered couches. Milu, heading the procession, explained.

"Tari-Hi has bidded that these be brought for you, in place of the beds you have," he told Whauple. "And if you would have candles—"

"Comes of having youth and beauty about the place," Erasmus remarked to Marshall. He thanked Milu, and bade him

thank Tari-Hi also, for this kind thought of their comfort; he refrained from adding that he might have thought of it before, until Milu was out of hearing. The couches were placed inside his chamber, and he tried one by lying down on it.

"We'll indent for spring mattresses and a gas stove, and then we'll be complete," he declared. "Henry, my lad, this is unlucky for you—I shall be able to come over and scrag you for snoring, one of these fine nights. I've had it in mind every night, so far, but was afraid I might scrag your boss by mistake."

"I do not snore," Henry declared.

"I'll wake you up and let you listen to yourself—then you'll know whether you snore or not," Erasmus threatened. "No, you don't snore, Henry. You scratch your backbone against your teeth where the mosquitoes bit you—I'll take a photograph of your snore, and show you what it's like, one of these nights."

"Whauple," Marshall said, "I feel I'm getting fat—this life threatens to be too lazy for us."

"Fat in the head, perhaps," Erasmus suggested. "The rest of you looks pretty Apollo-ish. Want some exercise?"

Marshall nodded. "We're too lazy," he repeated. "We may want all our muscle as well as our wits, any time."

"Skipping ropes," Erasmus suggested.

"Not a bad idea—can you box?"

"Hit like a mule kicking—you're bigger than I am, but we might have a few rounds every morning, if you want to keep fit. It's a sound way of keeping up your wind."

They determined to add boxing and skipping to the day's routine, and, much against his will, compelled Henry to take part. Marshall was determined to lose none of his efficiency, for, as he had said, they might require all their physical energy at any moment, and slackness was the surest way to ill-health. So far, Henry had been no trouble on the score of fitness, a fact over which Marshall congratulated himself.

"Little job for you, Marshall," Whauple told him. "Tari-Hi ordered the pantechnicon for us—it's up to you to go and return thanks, seeing that you've got a free pass to court circles."

"I'm going in any case," Marshall answered. He wondered what might be the nature of the ceremony in which Aia was taking part that day, and whether she intended Tari-Hi to know that she had asked him to come to her. However that might be, he felt that he ought to thank Tari-Hi for this practical demonstration of friendliness.

"H'm!" Whauple commented. "I don't see that you need make all the running for them—it's a bit swift."

"It was a request—I couldn't refuse," Marshall pointed out.

Whauple looked at him with an odd expression. "Don't you go and lose your head," he advised. "You'd only be sorry, after."

"My head's safe enough," Marshall declared. "Aia is a very charming young lady, but twenty Aia's wouldn't keep me here when a way out shows itself for us."

"One might make you a bit less eager to find a way," Erasmus objected, "if you ain't careful. I know what it is—I had my little affair, years ago, and I wouldn't have given the world for one word from my girl, while it lasted. We're all fools when a woman asks us to be, and Aia's one of the sort that could make any man a fool, if she liked. When you dropped in here, Marshall, I counted you a whole team and a cross dog under the wagon—you're younger than I am, but I'd reckon you a man to follow, if you keep your head. Don't you go and let me down because of Aia, because you brought hope into this blasted place, and I don't want to lose it again."

"We'll walk out of this place together, yet," Marshall answered, not a little touched by the appeal. "I don't know how, but we'll find our way, and when you see any signs of my letting you down, you can remind me of it."

"Sure thing—I will," Erasmus promised. "My old mother's waiting for me in a little house down in Balham, if she's still alive, and probably you've got a wife waiting for you, somewhere. Don't let's forget 'em, either of us."

He turned back into his chamber, and reappeared with the rods and lines. "Now we'll go fishing," he announced. "I'm not due to catch another for about a week, but hope springs eternal—and there's no telling what might happen to your hook before the sun gets too high."

They returned empty-handed to give the new couches a fair test in the heat of the day. Henry, returning also, looked gravely important.

"You caught anything, Henry—because we couldn't?" Erasmus asked him. "Want something to cheer us up."

"I fear that I cannot cheer you," Henry answered, looking gravely at his couch. "The little boy has told me of the path to

the post of the look-out man, and if he is speaking truthfullee, we are at a loss for a means of evading the present situation."

"Now stop and take breath, and then start again," Erasmus advised. "It's lucky you only swallowed one dictionary, Henry. Where is that path? Hand it out."

"I cannot hand it out, alas!" Henry answered. "It is a tunnel, beginning in the house of the head man in the valley, and coming up under the bed of the river and inside the hill, until it comes out at the post of the look-out man at the top. He can come up and go down, and we can never see him come and go—the little boy was verree proud to tell me."

"Bless his little heart!" Erasmus commented, philosophically. "Well, we're no worse off than we were before. Stick to him, Henry—you may get something useful out of him yet."

He thought over it awhile. "We might have known there was some catch in it," he concluded.

"We can give that up," Marshall said. "These people must have been pretty good at excavating, on the whole."

"Damn 'em—I wish they hadn't been quite so good," Erasmus reflected. "But we're no worse off, and it's a long policeman's beat that's got no cook on it. I'm not giving in."

He said it defiantly, as if he would convince himself that a way would be found.

"Good man, Whauple," said Marshall. "We'll smile over this, yet."

YET there they were, he reflected, as he went across the plateau that evening to find Aia. There they were, apparently as far from a means of escape as the crab slide. Then it came to him that reasoning on these lines had been Clement's downfall: the apparent absence of any way out had driven Clement down to the valley of silent men; he had taken the cash in hand and left the rest, sacrificed the possibilities of the future to present actualities. Thus it would be fatal to admit that escape was impossible.

Two women of the valley passed him, going toward the upper end—Whauple's and Milu's end—of the plateau; he noted that they passed him, but no more. Already he knew that men and women came up from the valley on varying tasks at Milu's command—these two were as others, silent, hurrying figures.

The travesty of life in this valley, its quiet horror down there on the other side of the river, appalled him freshly, like the corpse of one murdered seen for the first time. The silent children, little ones who who could never know happy laughter. . . . He pictured the valley he might not see as a noiseless place of hurrying figures like these two women he had passed, a region of eternal quiet, shut in by its opalescent haze by day and by night as a valley of the dead. Never a cry might come out from it, never a voice call—it was unnatural, a place of fear, a half-life rather than life, hateful to contemplate and a blot that use could not pale, no matter how long one might remain beside it.

Thus feeling, rather than thinking, he came on Aia, near the lower end of the plateau. She was white-robed, as when he had seen her last, and she faced him in the brief dusk, standing out against the line of moon-flushed eastern sky like a slender palm, her unstudied grace enhanced by the shining, night-black wave of her glorious hair. A little ghost of a wind came out of the west and cooled the evening; on Aia's brow, just where her hair was drawn back and the beaten gold circlet clasped, was set one white blossom, shining against its black background like a star. She looked pale, but it might have been the glow of coming moonrise behind her that gave him the impression; she seemed, too, very weary, as if the night of vigil and day of initiation had been too much for her strength. And with it all she was most lovely, a very perfect flower of womanhood at its dawning—again Marshall thought what it would mean if Aia could be taken and set, say, among the powder puffs and artificialities of London: it would mean . . . he checked the thought. Aia in this valley was a perfection of loveliness—and she had bound herself to the valley.

Before either spoke, there happened a thing most wonderful, and beautiful as wonderful. Night had followed on the little minute of the tropic dusk, and now of a sudden the moon's rim leaped from under the world to make molten silver of the far-off sea. It framed Aia in light, almost defined the strands of her lustrous hair, and threw her face in shadow so that Marshall, facing the silver glow in which she stood, saw only the sadness of her eyes. The light shone full on his face, showing it to her as almost awed.

"You fear, Mar-shal?" she asked.

"Lest I should love you, Aia."

He had not meant to speak the words; the magic of this splendid vision formed the thought, and it had leaped to sound.

Aia smiled.

"Would there then be cause for fear?"

He called to mind Whauple's appeal, Clement's choice, the silent children of the valley—he balanced on the edge of an answer that would have made him as Clement, slave to this place, and swung back to sanity.

"You are more wonderful than dreams, Aia," he said, "and in that moment—turn and look forth to the world's edge, and see how night made you glorious."

She turned and looked as he bade. There was low-hanging mist on the marshes below Mah-Eng, and beyond the mist, which was as shining grey gauze flung down in wavy folds, the liquid silver sea flamed cold to where the moon rode in deep-hued, velvet space.

"Let us go down to the wall, and there look forth," Aia asked. "I have seen this wonder many times, yet still is it new and wonderful."

They went across the plateau to the wall that framed the sheer cliff of the eastern end, a breast high battlement to as strange a fortress as ever was made and forgotten by the age that made it. Marshall leaned on the wall; he would not look at Aia, for he was still afraid.

"I saw your thoughts in your eyes, Mar-shal," she told him. "Do the people of your land still call you back so strongly, or is it that you would call to them—keep them in mind in hope of return?"

It was easy mind-reading, he thought, and his incautiously spoken sentence had given her the key to any expression she might have seen on his face. "Life calls, Aia," he answered, "from this dreaming quiet to action. It is not life when the power to shape and build has gone."

She stood back from the wall against which he leaned, and faced toward the moon. "Look on me, Mar-shal, and say—is action all of life?"

In the low, sweet music of the question triumph rang as a note in a perfect chord. He turned, and . . . empress of the world, were beauty given full rule, she smiled, her eyes inviting, challenging.

WHILE thus she faced him, there came to his nostrils such a fragrance as made his brain reel, an influence subtly sweet, fresh as a perfect dawn and yet elusive as the light between sunset and night's falling—a wonder of perfume that opened up avenues of delight and made silent music in his brain. A goddess stood before him clothed in light, and all things were possible, all dreams were true. . . .

"Is action all, O man?" she breathed.

He tried to find words for answer, but they would not come. Aia came to stand beside him, and the fragrance that had held him enthralled faded from his consciousness. It came from the flower she wore, he understood, and she had moved to stand so that the faint western breeze might let it sweep over him and fold him in its intoxicating embrace—it had been a palpable, live clasp about him, a sentience to destroy cold reason.

She took the white flower from her hair and flung it beyond the wall; Marshall watched it flutter down toward the bare black rock, fifty feet or more below.

"I have lived in that fragrance today," she said, "among spirits of old time and powers too great for name. Henceforth I am one with my task."

The assertion called for no answer. Beside her Marshall gathered his senses to reason after the assault of that tremendous fragrance; he longed to inhale it again, and understood a little of the temptation under which Clement had fallen.

"Forgive me, Mar-shal," Aia asked. "It was a woman's folly, thus to set a snare, yet it seemed good to me to test you—when thus I tested the one who went down to the valley, he fell babbling at my feet, less than man."

Marshall looked at her—the frank confession angered him, but in meeting her gaze the anger died out. He realized afresh that she was not as an ordinary woman; here, with none to combat or rival her, she saw no need to conceal her thoughts.

"Was it for that he went to the valley?" he asked.

She gestured dissent. "His woman called him with her beauty, and with the fragrance of the flower of sleep," she answered.

He understood, now, why Clement had praised the scent that had enslaved him: terrible though its effects might be, it was very wonderful, as Clement had said. Free of it again, he was able to realize its power over a weak will from the tremendous influence it had had on his own—and that not through going down to the fields, but merely by the exhalation of a single flower, backed by Aia's charm.

"Why did you bid me come to you, Aia?" he asked. She seemed so sure of herself, so far removed from any weakness, that he felt the reason with which she had accompanied the invitation was no more than an excuse. She laughed, softly.

"The question breathed distrust, Mar-shal," she explained. "I bade you come because you are man and I am woman, you are strength and I am beauty, and I would crown this great day with such an hour as we share."

From any other, he would have said that such a speech was rank and flagrant love-making, repellent by its lack of reticence. But Aia was not making love; her eyes and voice both negatived the suggestion.

"I do not understand," he said.

"I will tell you," she answered. "Today was I made mistress of old wisdom, given keys of power that I might in my turn rule the valley. Yet if I rule alone, Mar-shal, the line of Drua and his fathers ends, and it is not my will to be the last link in the chain that binds Baal Caesar's day to mine."

The utter certainty implied in that frank admission robbed him of the power to answer her—Whauple was right, and she looked on him as her future husband. Yet he could not despise her—that was the maddest part of this mad interview; such words as she had spoken ought to have put her down beneath his regard, but they did not.

"The stars told of your coming," she said, dreamily, "for all lives are ruled not alone by will—there is destiny's hand that aids in the shaping of man's course. And it was decreed that one should come—the one who went down to dwell in the valley of silent men—and pass, judged unworthy. After him should another come, a man in his strength, and wise. I was patient—I am patient still, for there are all the years."

He saw her face, grave and calm, and began to understand. As when she had talked with him before, so now she spoke impersonally—her detached outlook, her regard of herself without emotion, as part of a plan, redeemed her words from unwomanliness.

"We are man, and woman, Mar-shal, strength and beauty," she went on, "and the years will drive us to each other as surely as the earth drives up young corn from planted seed. As you fear, so I fear to love—if I loved you, could I stand here and speak thus beside you? I fear to love, fear to lose myself, turn shrinking, weak, appealing—no more to stand apart and see you separate, but to be as were you when the fragrance of the flower swept over you, a prayer of desire. To that point life sweeps, and we are leaves on its current—when we are swept together, we shall look back on these days and see them golden, for there is more beauty in the flower in bud than in fallen petals about the seeded stem."

NOW he understood fully. There was no need for Tari-Hi to plan, for the relentless urge that rules the world would drive them to each other, as she said, given time to aid this enforced proximity. Aia did not attempt to woo him; she merely faced fact, and that with as little present admission of the fact as himself—less, perhaps.

"Silent, Mar-shal?" she asked, with a quick change of mood. "Have I not spoken truth?"

"Truth only, Aia," he answered, and, more than ever, felt that he must find a way of escape from the valley. Otherwise, soon or late, he must grow to love her—he had to admit it.

"I fear," she said again, "for in that day I shall not be my own, and it is no small thing to me to yield self, own mastership. Yet"—she leaned ever so little toward him, and there was a world of tenderness in her smile—"as a thing far-off I can see the glory of that day, Mar-shal, the victory of yielding. When I creep to your arms and feel their welcome it will be with a smile, and if there are tears for the separate self foregone you shall not see them. I will make my beauty yet more beautiful, when I have learned of time and conquered fear, and you shall say in that day that there is a greater sweetness in life than the fragrance of the flower of sleep."

Caressing as were her words, and real as the dream was to her, still he understood that it was to her a vision of the future, not a picture of the present. She had insight that enabled her to stand apart and see her self as life must shape it, and courage to face and voice realities. She had merely stated the inevitable, with neither intent nor desire to hasten it.

"If such a thing should befall us, I will not fail you, Aia," he answered, soberly.

Again she smiled. "If I feared that, then destiny were futility," she said. "I have not spoken without reason, for now is all my life set to its course, and the powers to whose use I am pledged know my faith to the pledge."

This too he understood. She had planned this avowal as part of the day's task; she saw herself as a being of purpose, and that purpose included him, independently of the love which, as she had said, must sweep them together if ever he gave up

hope of escape from the valley. Only that hope, and the thought of regaining the outer world, held him from her, for if ever he gave up the thought of return from this place, there was but one compensation—facing him now. She knew what held him back from her, and in the certainty that he would realize escape as an impossibility was content to let time weaken outside influences.

"Walk back with me, Mar-shal," she asked. "We shall remember this night."

"Here or elsewhere, as long as we live," he agreed.

It was but a little distance to the lighted doorway in the cliff, beyond which Marshall could hear Tari-Hi and Drua talking in the language he did not know. Outside the doorway Aia paused and turned to look back toward the wall. The moon had climbed up the sky, and the molten silver of ocean was no longer visible, but still the marsh mists rolled in the distance, luminous, vague, an unreal white sea. Again Aia turned to him.

"We shall remember this night, Marshal," she said again. "May your dreams be few."

With that she passed within the doorway, leaving him to go on to his own place.

All through the night he lay wakeful, planning ways of escape and rejecting them one by one. The problem had become urgent, for he was afraid, no longer sure of himself.

That night Milu's wife died in premature childbirth.

AIA was right—patently, inexorably right. She knew her power, and the instinct that is in every woman, a thing more sure than any knowledge, gave her foresight of the effect two such as Marshall and herself must produce on each other, thrown together and uninfluenced by outside interests. With half her beauty, with the average woman's share of attraction, she might have been certain, and, as Aia. . . .

"Whauple?"

"Present and correct," came from Whauple's couch.

"We've got to get out of here, P.D.Q."

"I've been telling myself so for the last eighteen months, more or less," Whauple answered, unmovedly.

Marshall dropped his bare legs over the side of his couch. "Think about it while I have a dip," he suggested, and went out for his morning plunge in the river.

After breakfast, they set Henry to skipping while they boxed and rested and boxed again till both were glistening with perspiration and panting. "Shows we wanted it—getting much too soft," Whauple commented, leaning against the rock beside his doorway. "I'm not so good in my footwork as I used to be. Stick it, Henry, and use your ankles. You're as flatfooted as a duck."

Henry went off to Milu's children, later—it was not until he returned that they heard of the death of Milu's wife. Whauple and Marshall went fishing, baited their hooks, and settled themselves.

"Now," Marshall remarked, "we can get down to it. I've been awake all night, Whauple, thinking—we've got to find a way out of this place within a month."

"Why is the time limit clause inserted in the contract?" Whauple asked.

"Aia," Marshall answered, and let the one word stand alone.

Whauple considered it. "I get you," he said, "and if I were you, I'd be scared, too—she's it. That's why I don't let myself think we won't get out, in case you hear me thinking it. If you do, and if you start thinking it too, then I've got to see about a wedding present for Mrs. Aia Marshall—and the spring sales are all over, now, so I'd have to pay full price."

"Never mind the possibility," Marshall retorted, "or if you do think of it—for it is a possibility, as I've got to admit—just let it spur you to planning, hard planning. We'll put it this way: the reason nobody has ever got out from here is that nobody has ever wanted hard enough and set a time limit. They've done what you have done and I was in danger of doing, said that a way would turn up tomorrow instead of making one today."

"Sentiment sound—method of presentment quite clear," Erasmus commented. He lifted his line. "No, it wasn't a bite—go on."

"We must consider all ways and take the likeliest," Marshall continued. "First, the crab slide."

"Rule it out," said Erasmus, promptly. "As soon as you try it in daylight, the look-out man wallops his gong and starts playing marbles, and at night you can't get near it."

"Up the river," Marshall suggested next.

"Equally impossible, unless you can swim against a four-mile current faster than the silent men can run."

"Swim the river and risk the spiders."

"The far bank opposite to us is a thirty-foot rock wall, and when you've got to it,

the look-out man has already given the alarm. That's the way I tried—and you can't go the spider way at night, even if you could get across the river."

"Then there's through the fields of sleep on the chance of finding a way up the other hill and over it," Marshall suggested. "It's a night chance—we couldn't get into the valley by day."

"Nor by night—you can give up the idea of crossing the river after sunset," Erasmus answered.

"The cataract is impossible—there remains only to drop over the wall at the far end of the plateau, and risk the marshes," Marshall concluded. "And that's our only chance."

"There's no risk after a fifty-foot drop," Erasmus pointed out. "We simply pick up each other's remains and give 'em decent burial."

Marshall ignored the criticism. "Required, within one month," he said. "One grappling iron to fix on the top of the wall, and about fifty feet of something that will serve as stout rope. Goatskins split and plaited would do it."

Erasmus scratched his head thoughtfully. "There's something in this," he said.

"It may involve some shooting," Marshall went on. "We've got to pick on a dark night, and make our way down to the wall. Henry and I will keep off interference with the shot gun and a revolver—very useful in the dark, shot cartridges—while you fix the grappling iron on the top of the wall and drop down. Henry follows you while I keep on blazing away, and then I come down the rope—I shall have slung the gun on my back, for we'll want it undamaged—and finish holding 'em off with revolver fire. The rest is according to circumstances."

"Marshall, I believe you've hit it," Erasmus said. "The trouble before has been that there was nobody to keep 'em off while somebody slung a rope over. But this looks like it—if we can pull it off. You know it's life or death for me?"

"Perhaps," Marshall answered. "A little judicious persuasion on my part might commute the sentence to penal servitude, as a present. But we must make up our minds we're not going to fail—it's our one chance."

"And you know what's at the bottom of the cliff?" Whauple asked.

"I have an idea," Marshall answered.

"Our troubles begin there—it's the first installment of a thrilling new serial—order your copy early to prevent disappointment," Whauple said solemnly. "There's malaria down there, and marsh fever, and possible starvation, possible pursuit from here—though that's the least danger—quite likely we'll get bogged in impassable country, and if we do get round the hill and up out of the marsh, the chances are that we'll run up against savages with poisoned arrows before we get round and back to the line of the river. If we pick on this way out, the chances are about a thousand to one against our ever living to see Sapelung."

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The Starkenden Quest

By Gilbert Collins

A lovely lost girl, an all but hopeless clue, a forbidden land where mysterious gods brooded and unseen terror menaced. . . . No stranger journey had mortal man ever taken than that haunted safari which lured Gregory Hope to the brink of the Unknown—and beyond. . . .

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"And if we don't pick on it, the chances are exactly nil," Marshall pointed out. "It's the only possibility—there is no other way."

"There is no other way," Whauple repeated, thoughtfully.

"Then—do we try this?"

Whauple lifted his line and looked at the hook again. "We do," he answered. "Better be dropped in the attempt than not make it—if we die it will be with the knowledge that we've done our best. I'm game. What about Henry Walker, though?"

"We must explain it to him fully when we've got our grappling hook and rope ready, and settled the day and time—not before. He must choose for himself, but I think I can influence him to risk it."

"Then that's settled—all but the hook, for the rope's easy. We're off—let's shake on it."

THEY sealed the compact with a handclasp, and Marshall drew a deep breath of relief. "Now I can face Aia without being afraid of her," he said. "I may be a fool, but honestly I was afraid of finding her too attractive, unless there were a definite hope of escape."

"Nothing foolish about it," Whauple responded. "Aia's—well, she's just lovely, with brains to back it. I never saw a woman could hold a wax vesta to her, and if it hadn't been for this chance you were a sure goner—all luck to you for keeping your head as you have, considering how much you've been with her."

He did not question when Marshall went out early that afternoon—it was part of the plan that Marshall should go and go again until he had the topography of the plateau's lower end quite clearly in his mind and knew the conformation of the wall by heart. Thus, that afternoon, he went down to the bamboo seat to find Drua and Aia there—Tari-Hi had gone to pay a visit of condolence to Milu, he learned from Aia.

"Sit with us awhile," Drua invited, graciously, and Aia seconded his bidding with a smile. Marshall was moved to ask a question.

"Drua, if I, or anyone, should say to you—'Release me from this valley, or die,' what would be your answer?"

Drua smiled indulgently, and then his face set to gravity. "Thus one spoke to my first-born son," he answered. "My son refused, and that one killed him with such a tool as that you wear at your waist. Also he killed four of the men from the valley, with a loud noise like rock falling from the cliff, before he was overpowered. They bound him to helplessness and laid him among the spiders, and when he had shrieked for a night and a day I bade them shoot him with arrows to end his sufferings. The spiders ate his eyes while he yet lived. It is the law, though I would doom no man to such agony, could I alter it. He who kills is given bound and living to the spiders, and I, Drua, broke the law when I made the archers shoot to end the shrieking."

The cold, bald statement gave Marshall a feeling of sickness—the horror of that death was such as he had never imagined.

"There is a cruelty in men, especially in young men," Drua went on. "It is a mark of the brute from which man rose. He who kills should himself be killed, lest he kill again, and that not as punishment, as was that death, but for the safety of those who have no desire to kill."

"That is justice," Marshall agreed. He realized that their project of escape by the cliff, since it involved killing, in all probability also involved being placed among the spiders in the event of failure.

"Still you think of return from the valley—to your own people?" Aia asked, with a note of compassion in her voice.

"Not in that fashion," he answered.

"There is no way—you are dead to your people," Drua said, echoing a sentence of Aia's that Marshall remembered. "Centuries have gone to the perfecting of this place, and even if I were content to take your pledge of silence, it is not in my power to open a way."

He rose, and Marshall stood too. "Let me lean on you to the door," he asked.

Marshall complied, readily, and fitted his pace to the old man's feeble crawl. At the doorway Drua paused. "When you come to this," he said, "may there ever be one beside you to give aid as you have aided me."

He cast a glance at Aia—it was not without a certain significance, Marshall thought—and then he went within. Aia looked at Marshall.

"Each day he grows weaker," she said. "Soon he will pass on to life."

Drua's conception of death came back to Marshall. He turned toward the cliff. "Let us go to stand where we stood in the moonlight," he suggested. "Thus, if Tari-Hi returns, I can talk with you alone."

She smiled, mischievously. "So soon, Marshall?" she asked.

"Lest you should reprove me again for neglect in listening to others while you are near," he retorted.

She laughed, walking beside him. "You have wit to evade," she said.

"In concealment of thought is safety," he replied quickly.

"I must learn to conceal," she said. "With me it is an untried art."

"As I have seen," he commented, rather caustically.

"Yet I might contrive to use the art, at need," she said.

SHE seemed quite different from Aia of the preceding night, her mood lighter, more gay and mischievous. They came to the wall bounding the cliff, and Marshall looked over, as if at the marshes beyond. He saw that there was a ledge, a foot or more in width, on the other side of the wall—one might stand there to defend the other two, protected from arrows by the wall. On both sides of him the wall itself was smooth, built of closely-fitting stones, but there might be such a crevice as they wanted just beyond sight in either direction. He would try farther up next time, nearer to the hillside, and away from the river. He must not spoil the plan by obvious search, and, by turning his back on the wall, he could map out possible routes from Whauple's quarters to this end of the plateau.

Aia came close to him and laid her hand on his arm: it was the first time she had touched him, and he felt an odd little thrill at the contact—not pleasurable, but rather as if the touch tensioned his mind to anticipation, and to keenness.

"You are far away," she said, with mock reproof. "You bring a child to play and leave it to play alone."

"Playmate," he answered gravely, "my mind is too dark for play, after a night without sleep. It is not always that one can laugh."

There was a tender concern in the way in which she regarded him; her light mood was gone on the instant, and he felt almost ashamed of himself for this deception necessary though it was.

"Let me find you interest to fit the hour," she suggested, "for there is no rest like self-forgetting. We will sit quietly, if you will, or you shall go back to Rasmi, or I will show you our temple—that only is left to show you, unless you would go down to the valley to see the fields of sleep and the silent men."

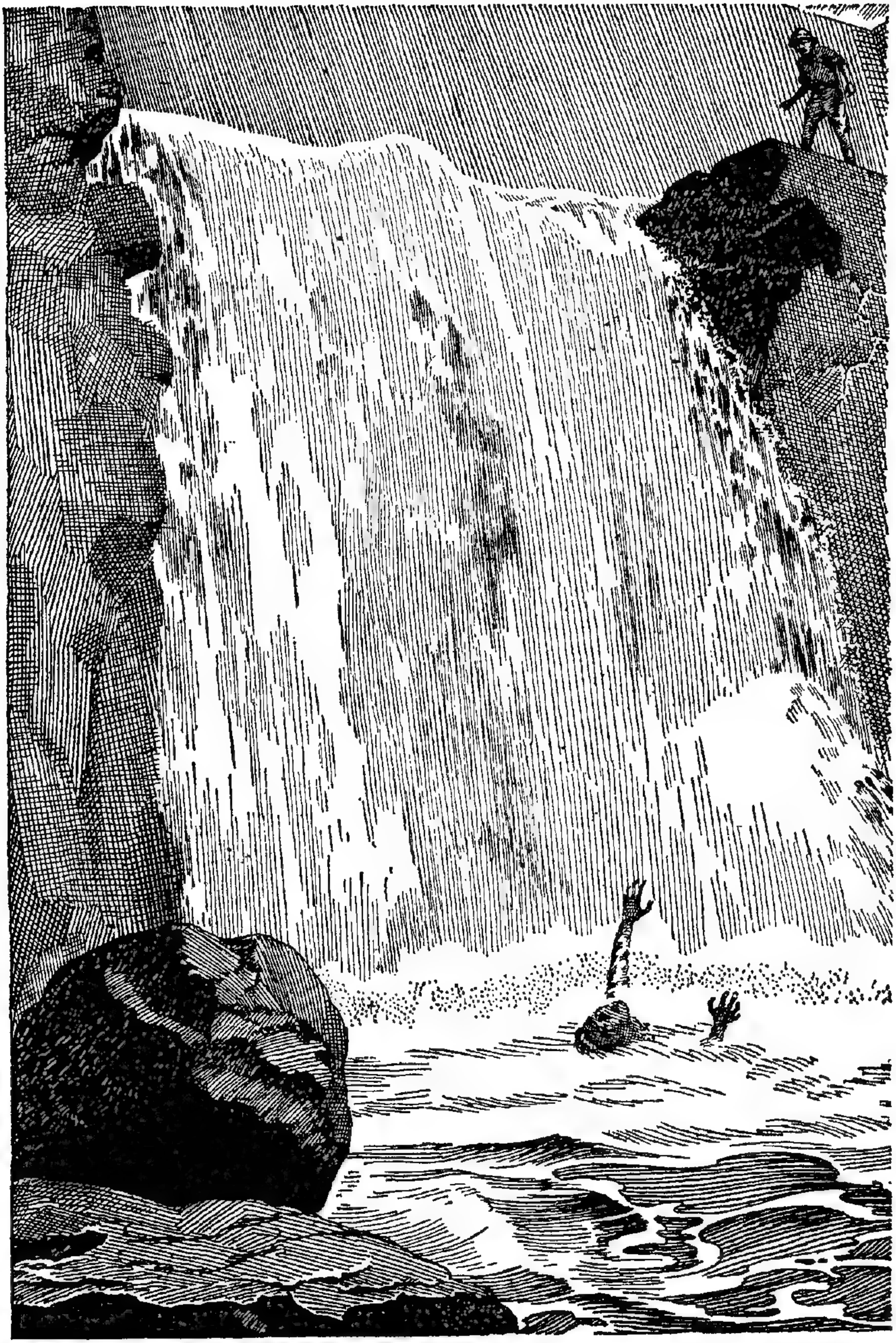
He made a hasty gesture of dissent. "Not the valley—I shall never wish to see it," he answered. "But to see your temple would fit the hour."

She took him along the cliff face, beyond the entrance to the mine that he had seen, and there was an open doorway—he had not observed its existence there before—some few yards down toward the lower end of the valley from Tari-Hi's quarters. He rubbed his eyes—he would have said that no such doorway as this existed in the cliff face, before they set out to reach it. Yet it was a spaciously wide entrance, with no sign of a portal to close it; there was enough of aperture to give light to the interior of this "temple," a large chamber hewn in the rock.

They passed from the hot sunshine of the plateau to the coolness and dim light of the chamber, and Marshall felt a sense of relief at the change. A faint, sweet memory of the fragrance of the flowers of sleep lingered ghostlike on the air; it was but the slightest hint of perfume, yet it moved him almost as had the strength that had been flung against him down by the wall, when Aia bade him to look on her. He gazed round the chamber, keeping silence.

On either side of him, carved in high-relief from the wall, a man-headed bull towered, true Assyrian in conception, and there were cuneiform inscriptions on the recesses under the bodies of these things, and above them too, dimly visible in the light from the doorway. Facing him as he stood with his back to the entrance, about twenty feet from the threshold of the place, was a great oblong block of stone, perhaps four feet in height and thickness, and eight or nine feet in length; it was perfectly plain, like a great stone box laid bottom upward, or a block quarried and squared to form a sort of table. Over it, like great plaques on the wall, were two carvings in white stone, and on these Marshall looked long and earnestly. Here, he thought, Drua had come for inspiration, and for knowledge such as his speech betrayed.

On the left was a man's face, and it might have been named wisdom; it was eternal youth, unwrinkled, potent, calm. The gaze of the stone eyes was one of infinite strength, and the lips set as if to restrain speech that the eyes might tell this being's will. It was of no type, but the best of all types was embodied—man as he shall be when life's perplexities have been laid aside, and the spirit stands upright with the unperturbed vision of a god.



To the right was its mate, purity. It might have been Aia's face, if from Aia's eyes could have been eradicated the sadness that marked them in repose. There was another difference, too, for in Aia's face were set all the possibilities of womanhood, but this face was passionless, forever young and spiritually beautiful, as was that of its fellow man. The two were a promise of what shall be in the later days, when man and woman have reached to the uttermost heights of being, and left the depths of human weakness behind forever.

"Who dreamed these?" Marshall asked, reverently.

"The first people who cut the way of the river," Aia answered. "Often have I come to look on them, but not till yesterday were they fully revealed to me."

Beside them the Assyrian sculptures were gross, indignities in the presence of strength and the beauty that is perfect purity. Yet Marshall's gaze wandered to the man-headed bulls—on the flank of that on his left were lines of writing, and he moved to look more closely.

There were two Dutch names, a "van Vuuren" and another that he could not remember after, and he saw the word "Scheveningen." What else they had written he could not read. Under them, "Pedro Gomara, Barcelona," had put a scrawl in Spanish, and that again Marshall could not read. And then came, in uncertain scratched lettering—

"John Franklin was eat by spiders. I am left here dead in hell. There is no way out. William Lambert. 1866."

NO MORE poignant message was ever left, Marshall felt rather than thought. Of the two, it seemed that the one who was "eat by spiders" had had the better fate, from William Lambert's cry. Had he, too, in the end gone to the spiders? Tari-Hi had said that they "went mad, or died," here in the valley.

There was no other record—having found these, Marshall looked carefully to see if others might have left any mark of their existence in the valley, but in vain. Save for the relief carvings of the walls, and the two splendid heads over the oblong stone, the place was void of ornament, and the stone itself was its only furnishing. In the gloom at the back was a doorway, leading to darkness.

"I would come to this place at times, to look on the faces there," Marshall said.

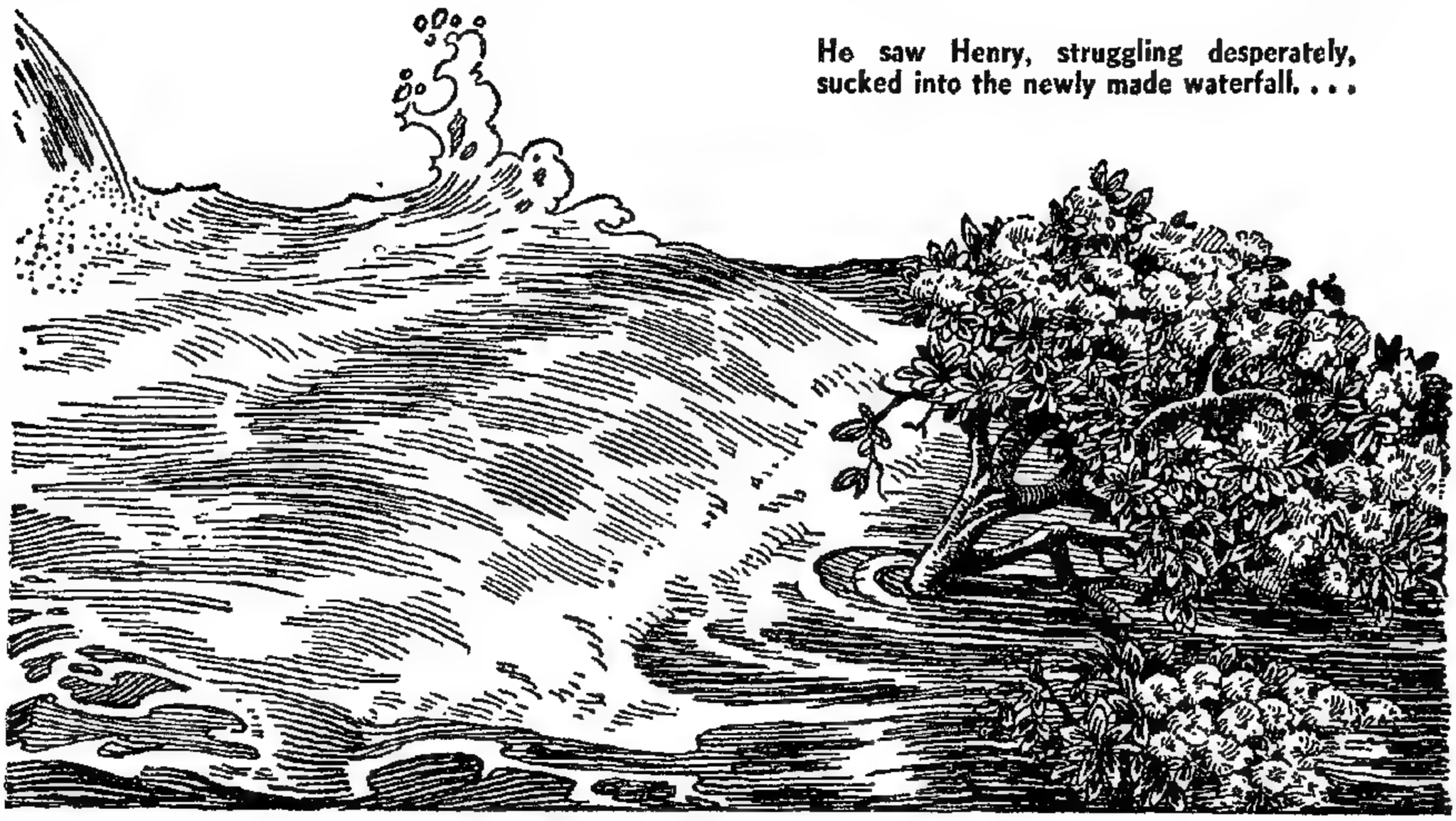
"You may not enter alone," Aia answered.

He looked a query; he was free to enter and explore the entrance to the mine—why not to this place?

"In the first days, when the guard was set here, it was understood that there might come a day when the valley would be won from us who hold it," she explained. "To that end was there a place of refuge made for us who rule."

"This place?" he queried.

"Beyond this place," she answered. "This is but the entry—I may not tell you more,



He saw Henry, struggling desperately, sucked into the newly made waterfall. . . .

for it is only to us who have taken the oath of guardianship that our last hold may be known."

There was something about Aia which said that, when she had told as much as she cared to tell, it were useless to question further. She had reached that point now, Marshall knew.

"The stone, there," he suggested. "Was it placed by the people of old time, or by your own people?"

"By our own people," she answered. "There is a cavity in the stone, and when it was lowered into its place there were five young men placed in the cavity, that their lives might form a lasting guard. So they who set the stone believed. I have seen, in my dreams, the five prisoned in the narrow cavity, and wondered how they died."

Familiarity with the story had dulled its horror, for her, but to Marshall the grisly thought of the "five young men," penned in airless darkness, was on a level with that of the spiders and their use. It was a tragedy of centuries back, but it was as if the spirits of those five tortured beings still haunted the chamber.

"If this is your temple, what are your gods?" he asked suddenly.

Aia smiled. "Gods?" she asked, as if the word were a futility. "They in the silent valley have gods—men make gods as they see mankind, striving to express the eternal. How shall a man name a god, save that he bring it down to the level of man? The powers in whose presence I stood but yesterday are greater than gods, not to be expressed or understood by little human minds. For we are as said Drua, dust on a ball that rolls through space, and the hand that flung the ball is past our knowledge, too great to rank with gods."

She spoke with certainty, almost with contempt for the idea of gods—these carvings on the wall were nothing, in her belief. He had thought to find some trace of old Babylonian deities and their worship, but at some time these governors of the valley had thought past those old superstitions —to something finer, it seemed.

"There is little kindliness in your belief," he commented.

"There is truth," she answered, "and we ask no more. Yet there is—" She hesitated, as if some new thought had come to her. "We are given sight and understanding beyond that of men who make gods after their imaginings. Twice in life may I call, if there should be cause to call, for guidance in my task."

She spoke almost as much to herself as to him, as if pondering something while she spoke. He stood silent beside her.

"Twice," she said again, "and it comes to me that there is need of guidance now. Yet—twice, and no more."

She paused, irresolute, then without speaking more, went up to the oblong stone.

Marshall moved within three paces of her, and waited, while she stood with her head bowed, and her arms stretched out before her, over the stone. So for minutes she stood, rigidly still, and then there leaped up toward her arms a steady flame, white and strong, yet near to her as he stood Marshall felt no warmth from it. The occurrence was so weird that he forgot to fear, and stared, unbelievingly, while the flame reared to the level of her arms from the surface of the stone, and as she raised her arms above her head it rose to stand level with her finger tips, so that she was outlined against a sheet of fierce light, which yet was cold. Had it been any fire that he knew, it would have scorched him at the distance at which he stood, and would have shrivelled her who stood almost touching it.

Her arms fell suddenly, and the flame vanished as inexplicably as it had come—his sight of it was too brief to determine its nature, and he knew only that it was cold, seeming to chill the place by its presence. As Aia's arms dropped he saw her sway as if about to fall, and he started forward, caught her in his arms.

The faintness was no more than momentary. She recovered herself and stood away from him; her eyes were set with fear, and all the colour had gone from her face; she looked death-like as she stared at him; "Through you!" she whispered, and again —"Through you—"

"What have you seen, Aia?" he questioned, gently.

She regained her normal composure with a tremendous effort, but he saw how, at intervals, she shivered as if with cold. "Let us go out to feel the sun, Mar-shal," she answered. "I have asked, and have had answer to my asking—it is enough."

"But what have you seen?" he persisted.

"That which I asked to see," she said, and, as before, he knew it would be useless to question further.

They went out from the chamber, and in daylight Marshall suddenly realized the unreality of what he had seen. It was impossible that a flame should be cold—the whole thing was trickery of some kind, a

little scene played through to impress him. Yet to what end—why should she need to impress him in any way, save by her own personality?

He looked back toward the temple entrance, and repressed a cry of alarm. For there was no entrance, now—the rock wall looked solid as if there had never been means of ingress to the chamber.

Aia?" he said, and pointed.

She smiled, faintly. "It is our last refuge," she said, "and if there be aught in what I saw—" She checked herself, as if she had been about to say more than she intended.

He went back to the cliff face, and looked at it closely at the point where he thought the doorway must have been, but there was no sign of a doorway. There were faint cracks such as a face of rock sometimes shows, but they were wavering lines, nothing like the squared entrance through which he had passed with Aia. He had not seen her make any move to work a mechanism that might have closed the door; the thing was utterly inexplicable.

"It was real," he said confusedly, as if to convince himself.

"All things are real, and nothing is real," she answered. "I may be a mote in a beam of light, imagining you beside me, or you may be the mote and I the dream. Is the rock real—where begins reallty, and where ends thought? Question no more, Mar-shal, for some things are past our telling."

She led the way along by the cliff to Tari-Hi's doorway, and there left him bewildered, wondering what he had in reality seen, if they had entered that chamber in the rock, or if he had dreamed it all.

THERE went by a little more than a week, during which both Marshall and Whauple sought in vain for something that would serve for their grappling iron, and Marshall found that the wall at the lower end of the plateau was innocent of any crevice in which they might place a stake to hold their rope. It seemed that the only thing they could do would be to get a stake which they might drive into the ground on the near side of the wall, upright against it, and trust to that stake to hold their weight while they went down the rope.

Such a plan would serve for the first two to go, for the one remaining could hold the stake firm, but it was a slender chance for that last one. Talking it out, they concluded that the two who had got down might break the fall of the third, if the stake were pulled out by assailants before he reached the foot of the cliff.

"Anyhow, we've got to wait till the dark of next moon," Whauple concluded, "and we may find a hook by then."

Marshall agreed. They began to plait their rope, and wore round their bodies the pieces that they plaited, lest the attendants whom Milu sent to do the work of their chamber should find the rope and suspect its purpose. So far, they told Henry nothing of their intention; Marshall judged it best to give him little time to brood over the idea, lest he should dwell on its dangers and get too frightened. Marshall himself fully realized its danger; it was a desperate chance, and the odds were on failure. There were times when he wondered if they ought to engage on an adventure of such tremendous risks, especially when he considered that the alternative, in all probability, to escape, consisted in being placed bound among the spiders.

Yet the choice lay between taking the risk, and ending their days in the valley. And, in spite of Aia's presence as compensation, he had no intention of ending his days here without at least this one effort to regain the outer world.

He saw little of Aia in that week. Sometimes, when he went down the plateau, she would come and talk with him, but there seemed a change in her since that uncanny scene which now was but half real when he thought of it—had it been real? He questioned, time and again. He could not define the difference he felt in Aia, but it seemed that she was less frank, and without being able to say that she avoided him, he had an impression that she was not so eager to meet him as at first. It might have been just a mood, however.

He held long discussions with Whauple, over their ineffectual fishing, with regard to the actual escape. They planned it thoroughly, settled the hour of emergence from the chamber—two hours before dawn—and made calculations of the time it would take to reach the wall and get down. They scaled down the baggage they meant to take—for it would be folly to face the journey back without some means of getting and cooking food. They went over the details again and again, testing the plan in theory, and Marshall found the place where they might plant their stake, a point where turf went up close to the wall, suggesting sufficient depth of soil to give good hold.

Then—the moon had passed its full—Marshall came back one night, having been down by the wall with Tari-Hi, and called Whauple by name as he made his way to his couch.

"Something fresh?" Whauple asked in reply.

"They keep a guard at the foot of the cliff, when there's no moon," he answered. "They have a sort of rope ladder with bamboo billets for steps, hooked on the wall, and the silent men go down for the night. It's a hornet's nest to drop on."

Whauple lay silent a long time.

"This wants a hell of a lot of thinking over," he said at last.

"Possibly," Marshall answered, "and possibly it requires no more thought whatever."

"I don't know," Whauple said, but there was little hope in his tone. "We'll talk it all out tomorrow, anyhow."

Henry was awake, and neither of them wished to let him know the plan, as yet. They both thought, as they lay awake, that there might, after all, be no need to enlighten him. The venture had seemed desperate enough before, without this added danger.

Thinking it over, Marshall recalled how Aia had swooned with fear before the oblong stone, and had hinted that he was in some way connected with her fear. Had she a sort of premonition, or second sight, that forewarned her of their attempt? He wondered if it would be safe to question her about it.

CHAPTER VII

HENRY'S LITTLE JOKE

HENRY went away, next morning, to amuse himself with Milu's children, as usual; though there was no longer a possibility that Milu's boy could be of use with regard to a means of egress, yet Marshall felt that they lost nothing by keeping in Milu's good graces through Henry, who, more than ever now that Milu's wife was dead, was useful to Milu through his intimacy with the youngsters.

Marshall and Whauple settled themselves on the river bank, with intent to discuss the added complication in their plan of escape; neither of them had mentioned it since Marshall had made the bare announcement the night before, owing to Henry's presence, and now Marshall felt a certain diffidence in opening the subject. The obvious dangers attendant on the plan were so great that he was almost certain they ought to abandon it, and yet .... apparently there was no other way.

Whauple, too, seemed inclined to skate round the subject. "Next fish is about three days overdue, so far as my hook's concerned," he remarked, "and as for you, you're a dud at it."

"Luck," Marshall answered. "My fishing is always a matter of luck, and nothing else."

"And it looks as if the luck's against us," Erasmus remarked, in a way that proved he was thinking of other things than fishing.

Marshall looked at him rather anxiously: it was the first time he had observed a break in his companion's cheery optimism. But Whauple looked past him, downstream, in a way that betokened surprise on his part, and Marshall, following his gaze, saw Tari-Hi approaching.

"First time I've ever seen his majesty up here in the foreign quarter," Whauple remarked. "What's the wheeze?"

Marshall rose as Tari-Hi came up to them—it must be something unusual to bring him in person, as they both knew.

"My father asks for you, Mar-shal," he said. "He has come near his end, and would see you once more."

Marshall put down his rod and went, without speaking. Tari-Hi, after the bare announcement, took him down the plateau, through his doorway in the cliff and on to an inner chamber, where the old man lay on a couch of goatskins, and Aia, risen at the entry of her father and Marshall, stood beside him. She gave Marshall a smile of greeting and would have gone out, but Drua bade her remain.

"Child," he said, "there is no need to leave us,"

She stayed in her place, on the opposite side of the couch to that on which Marshall stood with Tari-Hi. Drua's voice had lost half its resonance, and he was so gaunt that the skin seemed to hang loosely on his bones, but his old eyes had all their wonted fire as he gazed up at his visitor.

"I had a mind to see you once again, Mar-shal," he said. "I have seen many seasons pass, and in my day have ten men come to this place. To you alone of the ten would I bid farewell."

"An ill word to me from such a man as you, Drua," Marshall replied—and meant it. The old man seemed to him of a sort that the valley could ill spare from among its people.

"It is for a very little time," Drua said.

"If there be given to you such length of years as I have known, yet is their sum but a moment in the great plan of which life is part. To you, lacking your kin and land, it may be that the years will seem long, but beyond the gateway and out of time it will be to me as if I took one step and looked back to see you following."

With only one brief glance at Aia, Marshall noted her gaze at him. It was in some way reminiscent of the vision in the temple which had made her fear.

"This I know, Drua," he said, "the days in this place will be longer for the knowledge that you are gone from it."

"Because of that, Mar-shal, I would have seen you this once, apart from all else," Drua told him. "Finding some kinship to your thought in my own, you would that I might still talk with you. I bid you—lean on no man, for counsel is but assent or dissent—strength is from within. Cherish that of you which is ever alone, the secret place of thought that none may share, for there is strength. For there is that in man which is ever lonely, if he come up to the gate of wisdom through his knowledge, and you are not far from the gate."

"I have found aid in unshared thought, and aid too in counsel," Marshall answered—the old man had no strength for argument, he knew, and indeed he wondered how life held itself in this semblance of a living being. "Count it no lack of wisdom in me that I would have had your counsel, rather than lose it."

"My work is done," Drua said, with quiet content. "My son, here, and Aia his daughter, remain to carry it on. This I ask of you, Mar-shal—since life has set you here, let it shape you as aid rather than as a regret for the life you have foregone. This thing is in your own hands, to make as you will."

Marshall met his gaze steadily, clearly, but did not answer in words.

"Wisdom will come to you with the years," Drua said again, "and in thus speaking with you my part is done. Make neither promise nor prayer—only remember that I have spoken."

He beckoned, very feebly, to Tari-Hi, who leaned over him. They spoke together in the language which Marshall did not know, and in the end Tari-Hi straightened himself and stood back from the couch. Aia seated herself again beside the old man, and Marshall wondered if he should go out and leave them, for Drua had given no sign of dismissal, nor had Tari-Hi indicated if he should go or stay. When some minutes had passed Drua, whose breathing had grown shorter and more feeble since he spoke with Marshall, gestured slightly, and Aia understood. She passed her arm under his shoulders and partly raised him—he had grown far too weak to raise himself.

"I see—" he whispered. "I see—"

After nearly a minute, Aia let him fall back gently on his pillow. Tari-Hi looked at Marshall and smiled.

"Death is a kinder thing than the life we know," he said. "He lives, now."

A creator of life, who could not live . . . an insect who worshiped Man on Everest's peak . . . three space-voyagers who made blood-sacrifice to Fear—and a single destroyer who crouched in all their minds, drawing them ever closer to the web of—

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The old, old face had about it a look like that of the eternal youth carved on the wall of the temple, Marshall thought. He turned away, silently, and went out with Tari-Hi while Aia knelt beside the couch.

HENRY, returned earlier than usual, sat gloomily on his couch: he looked up as Marshall entered, but did not speak.

"Got a fit of nerves, Henry?" Marshall asked.

"It is my young ladee, sir," Henry answered, sadly. "If we had the convenience of a postal service from this place, I would not so much mind, for my salaree is mounting up prodigiouslee. Yet it looks as if it would mount up still more prodigiouslee before I get back to her."

"She'll wait," Marshall said, with an attempt at reassurance far from consonance with his own feelings. "Keep smiling—everything will come out all right in the end."

"There seems to be an indefinite delay in regard to our departure," Henry ventured.

"Exactly," Marshall agreed. "It's indefinite—we may start any day."

Henry brightened considerably at the baseless promise. He had the mercurial temperament of his race, and a word could cheer or depress him, at any time.

"Mr. Whauple—he is verree sad today, sir," he remarked, "and it must be that his despondency has communicated itself to me."

"Well, you think of some little joke or something to raise his spirits," Marshall advised. "We must keep on smiling to keep ourselves fit—it would never do to let ourselves get depressed."

He concealed his own depression, and took to his skin-covered couch to think over the possible—or impossible, as he realized them one by one—ways out from the valley. Whauple was right, of course; over the wall was as impracticable as any other way, suicidal, in fact.

Whauple maintained a gloomy silence from the time of his entering the chamber until, somewhat later than usual, Marshall went out and almost without thinking turned down toward the plateau. He found Aia on the bamboo seat, and saw in her face a more certain welcome than on any occasion since he had visited the temple with her. Time after time he had scanned the cliff for some sign of the entrance to that place, but he was not even sure of its location, and for all that he could see by examining the cliff it might have been non-existent. Probably there was some cunning arrangement of overlapping flakes of rock to mask it, he thought, and some mechanism of a nature like that which operates on iris diaphragm, to actuate the covering pieces, with a system of balanced weights. But how or from where the mechanism was worked he had no idea, and he knew it would be quite useless to question Tari-Hi or Aia.

"Sit here and talk to me, Mar-shal," Aia bade. "Tell me of your life, and the people you have known—it must be perplexing to know many people, very confusing to thought."

"No more than knowing few," he answered, seating himself beside her, "for one chooses two, or three, to know, and the rest come no nearer to real knowledge than these silent people of the valley have come to you."

"Then you lose little by coming to Mah-Eng," she concluded. "Yet tell me of the world you know—of how men live as you have lived."

With a thought that she seemed to forget Drua's death easily, in spite of her apparent attachment to him while he lived, he tried to describe to her the complexity of a modern city, the wonders of its architecture, the amusements of its people, and similar things which he judged would be within her powers of comprehension. It was difficult, in view of her very limited experience, to find similies with which to compare the things she had not seen, but he found in telling that tradition had made her familiar with the plan and life of old Babylon. Her knowledge might have been imperfect and distorted, but it would have rejoiced the heart of any archaeologist.

It was natural, of course, that the descendants of the first exiles, maintaining their culture as best they could in this solitude, should keep in mind the glories of the race from which they sprang. Her comparisons, drawn from her knowledge of the ancient world, contrasted oddly with his descriptions of modern life.

"A troubled life, with no time for thought," she commented.

"Not so, but a life that forces thought to keenness," he answered. "In its action is perpetual training, perpetual advance of thought."

"I see more value in the quiet from which Drua gathered wisdom," she reflected.

"Do you not grieve for Drua's passing?" he asked suddenly.

Aia shook her head. "His life was rounded to a wise completeness," she answered, "and he has passed to a greater life, a more perfected service. We should but vex him there if we grieved, and it is as he said but a step to pass to him, though the illusion we call time makes of the step a task of years."

THE calm certainty of her answer had a certain grandeur about it; something of Drua's wisdom seemed to have communicated itself to her. Before Marshall could speak again, she rose.

"Come and eat with us Mar-shal," she said. "My father will welcome you."

He accepted, after a momentary hesitation. Whauple and Henry would understand, and it would do Whauple no harm to be thrown on himself to conquer his fit of depression.

Within Tari-Hi's room the candles were lighted and the meal laid as before; there were three of the skin couches set about the table, as if Aia's invitation had been premeditated—but then Marshall realized that Tari-Hi would have had time to make the necessary preparations while they two walked from the bamboo seat to the doorway. There was no definite evidence that they had planned for his coming.

His host welcomed him, and told him that Drua's body had been removed for burning, though where or how he did not say; Marshall reflected that the practice of cremation was a necessity here. It was imperative that all available ground in the valley should be used for food production, and thus there was no space to spare for burial plots.

Tari-Hi talked of Drua with as little regret or restraint as Aia had shown; he described to Marshall the way in which Drua had thought out and perfected a system of improved sanitation for the valley, where the head men enjoined scrupulous observance of ordinances for cleanliness and all things affecting the health of the silent people. It was of necessity a perfectly ordered community, owing its continuance to nearly perfect government, and to the fact that the birth rate maintained itself at a higher rate than was necessary to keep up the numbers of the settlement, though at this time it was not so high as it had been in the past.

"Yet," Marshall objected, "in that case two generations would put it beyond the power of the valley to provide food for all. How is there a balance kept?"

"If ten children are born, one or two among the ten will betray some weakness, some defect," Tari-Hi answered. "Such are destroyed at birth, and thus there are no weaklings among our people."

It sounded horrible, but on consideration Marshall realized it as stern necessity, in view of the exact limitations on food production. In reality, too, it was as kind as the useless prolongation of lives of suffering and weakness which modern humanitarian doctrines decree—perhaps kinder, on the whole. Yet the system was open to abuse.

"Who decides whether an infant shall live or die?" he asked.

"It is Milu's task," Tari-Hi answered, "and in doubt he may call on me to judge. Only once has he seen need to call, and that child lives. But at this time, though not so much as in past days, our numbers grow too quickly."

There were ominous possibilities in that remark, Marshall thought.

"You who come from the outer world may find our laws strange," Tari-Hi said, "and at times you may blame us for some things, as you learn more of our customs. Yet every law is a fruit of gathered experience, weighed by the head men of the valley in council with the governor here. With one unjust law, Mar-shal, our guard would fail and die."

"In that would be no great evil, perhaps," Marshall ventured incautiously, tninking of the lives of the silent men.

Tari-Hi frowned momentarily. "The pledge laid on me, on Aia, and on Milu, is surety of continuance," he answered. "Until you realize the nature of our oath of governance, you cannot comprehend our purpose."

"It must be a mighty pledge," Marshall reflected aloud.

Tari-Hi rose in his place beside the table. "For that, and for some other reasons, I would be alone for a time," he said. "Forgive the discourtesy, guest of ours. Aia will talk with you till you choose to go to your own place."

With a slight inclination of his head he retired to an inner chamber and left the two together. It occurred to Marshall that Tari-Hi realized the situation as did Aia; he did not attempt to hasten the course of events, but merely accepted the situation, and tacitly approved it.

Aia looked at Marshall with a mischievous smile. "Do not fear—I will not harm you," she mocked his gravity. "Let us go out to the shadows, that the night wind may whisper you comfort."

She led him out and across the plateau to the wall; there he looked over, and saw that at the foot of the cliff a small fire burned. He called Aia's attention to it.

"It is the watch fire of the guard," she explained. "Should you or Rasmi attempt escape this way, they will throw bundles of dried grass on the fire and so light up all the cliff with the flame. Thus they keep it when there is no moon to light the cliff."

Leaning on the wall, he did not answer. So thoroughly had they guarded against escape that it seemed madness to try at any point. He felt a wave of depression sweeping over him, amounting almost to despair.

Aia laid her hand gently on his shoulder. "Mar-shal—do not grieve for what is past. I would that I might comfort you!"

Heaven knows what whirl of thought the gently spoken words made in his brain. Stephanie, Clement, Whauple, the abandoned plan of escape, the hopelessness of planning and finality of life here—Aia's eyes, soft shining in the starlight of the scented garden. . . . The world he asked was inexorably barred away. Aia was here, gentle, pitying, waiting—he swept her into his arms and held her, passive and unresisting.

Yet there was no more of response than resistance to the sudden movement, and her utter inertness made him pause. She was smiling, calm, unafraid—he released her again.

"There is no comfort—no more comfort than hope," he said, bitterly.

"Mar-shal," Aia answered tremulously, "there is that waiting you of which you cannot see the beauty, until you have learned of time."

"What can time teach?" he asked, almost with anger.

"Patience and forgetfulness," she answered. "When thus you clasped and held me, it was by a sudden emotion born of despair—as if you turned to me in default of things desired. It was not love that bade you grasp and hold."

"What is love, Aia?" he asked.

"Only by its urge shall you claim me," she answered. "When you stand before me, no longer your own, but mine in thought and will as in affection, man of mine completely, then will I also be no longer my own, but will yield myself to you, one with you in affection as in will. It may be"—she leaned toward him, almost whispering—"it may be that in my beauty you shall find a world, greater than that for which you grieve now."

He stood with drooped head, making no answer. By her high conception of what love should mean she had shamed him, who had thought to grasp her as a mere toy in compensation for the life he had lost. Aia waited, as if she looked for answer from him.

"Forgive me," he asked at last.

"Between us two there is no longer need for forgiveness," she said.

He saw, as she leaned toward him, a new softness in her eyes; they were no longer sad, for Aia had wakened to realization of their future as she foresaw it, of what must be when he had passed from thought of alternatives to see in her his destiny.

"Man of mine,"—she breathed the words with a new note in her voice—"it will be sweet to me to be yours."

BEFORE he could turn or move she fled from him, swiftly, noiselessly. He saw her pass through Tari-Hi's lighted doorway, and turned to go to Whauple and Henry again.

She had taught him a lesson. There was nothing small about her, and in spite of her solitary life she showed no lack of understanding of a man and his ways, while the beauty of which she spoke without restraint—as an inevitable attribute like sight or the power to walk, rather than as matter for self-consciousness—was of a quality that impressed him anew each time she faced him; it was not the beauty of feature that palls with use, but an enduring attraction rayed from the spirit that lighted her eyes and made them wonderful. She was . . Aia. He could not define her, could only come back to the haunting simplicity and depth of sound in her name.

He was near on loving her, then, dangerously near. But, away from the strong influence of her presence, he remembered poor old Erasmus, for whom he had brought hope into the valley. Not thus easily might he turn to the path which offered, though it were lighted by such radiance as Aia's eyes could shed along it.

Walking up by the cliff toward Whauple's chamber, he stubbed his toe against something in the dark, and, bending to ascertain the cause—for he was walking on smooth sward—he picked up a tortoise and put it down again. There were many of these things on the plateau, usually tiny denizens of the cultivated beds in which shrubs grew; this one was out of its place, and the size of it was exceptional, too.

Whauple sat on a stool by the entrance to the chamber. "That you, Marshall?" he called, as Marshall came near him.

"No," the answer came promptly. "It's the late postman."

"I'll get out of the habit of asking silly questions when I grow my third set of teeth," Whauple apologized. "I stopped up to tell you I'm sorry—I'd a fit of blues this morning, and knew I was a fool while I was one."

"That's all right," Marshall answered cheerily. "Forget all about it, and we'll just keep on smiling."

"Good for you," Whauple said. "Now I can go to bed with a pure heart and a humble voice. Clement's been up here while you were out paying calls down the other end of the boulevard."

"Anything special?" Marshall asked, reflecting that Clement seemed quite content with the company of the people of the valley, since he left those of his own race so severely alone.

"He's hopping mad," Whauple answered gravely. "His kid was born last night, and it was deformed, somehow. They've got a law that deformed kids ain't allowed to live to grow up, and Milu ordered this one to be destroyed—this morning. Clement's raging over it."

"Tari-Hi explained all that to me tonight," Marshall said. "Clement has got to conform to it like the rest of the valley people. It's a terrible thing for him and his wife—more for her than for him—but he made himself one with the silent people."

"Oh, I know that's the reason of it," Whauple responded, "but Clement was never too reasonable, and he's less than ever so over this. He came up here blasting and damning in that horrible whisper of theirs, and asking what right Milu's kids had to live while his was dead, and what right had a murderer like Milu to be alive either—he wanted Milu to go and get a special exemption for his case from Tari-Hi, and Milu wouldn't. Clement talks of wiping out Milu and his two kids as a sort of revenge."

"He wouldn't dare do more than talk—he knows quite well it would mean death for him among the spiders. Besides, two wrongs don't make a right, even if he could do it."

"He could do it all right—he's got his revolver and somewhere about a dozen rounds with him down there, and that watertight ammuniton ain't all gone bad yet."

"I don't see that we can do anything," Marshall said, thoughtfully.

"It ain't our affair, anyhow," Whauple agreed. "Clement's a silent man. I thought I'd just post you on it before turning in, and—say, Marshall, we'll find our way out of this yet, and if you'd like to take Aia with you, I'm game."

"We shall go without Aia," Marshall answered. "She belongs here, and she'll never leave the valley. And, as I told you once, Whauple—"

"No, you didn't," Whauple interrupted. "You said, 'Yes and no' when I asked you, and that might mean anything. Anyhow, I don't see that it matters, so long as we get away in the end, but Aia—well, she's just Aia."

He spoke a trifle regretfully, Marshall thought. They went within the chamber, where Henry scored less obtrusively than usual.

"Glad I had that word with you—I didn't want the sun to climb up and sit upon our wrath," Whauple remarked. "Good-night, Marshall."

"Good-night," Marshall answered. "We'll discuss the possibilities of the spider route tomorrow—it looks as likely as any."

It was an accurate description, he thought before he slept. The spider route was as likely—and as unlikely—as any other way out. But it would be fatal to abandon the last semblance of hope, for there was Aia, very near him, now, more wonderful than the fragrance of the flowers of sleep. In remembering her eyes he feared, lest they should lose the hope of escape.

ERASMUS, first out of bed as usual, the next day, gathered up the articles with which he made his simple costume, together with a sheet of coarse linen which served him as a bath towel, and went for his morning plunge. As soon as he was safely out of the chamber, Henry got out and took down from the shelf, beside Whauple's boots, a small parcel, linen-wrapped; this he placed carefully in Whauple's bed. Then he put on his drill jacket and shirt, and sat down to wait on events; Marshall sat up and regarded the proceedings with some interest.

"Something special there, Henry?" he asked.

"It is a tortoise, sir," Henry answered, rubbing his hands with delighted anticipation. "I catched him last night, but the opportunity to place him in position without fear of detection did not present itself.

So I tied him up as prevention of running away, and we shall see Mr. Whauple indulge in loud laughter, when he unwraps the parcel."

He waited patiently until Whauple returned, having dried and dressed himself on the river bank; he entered with the briskness of one much refreshed by his bath.

"Nearly a nip in the water, Marshall—quite cool. You'll enjoy it"—he sat down on his couch—"if you get out before—hell and hambones!"

He jumped up and looked at the bulge under the covering of his couch on which he had sat. Then he put his hand inside and drew out Henry's parcel, very gingerly.

"Who in blazes put that there?" he inquired.

"Ke-he-hee!" Henry giggled. "It is a joke—keehee—a little joke."

Whauple, with a suspicious look at the joker, unwrapped the parcel slowly and carefully. "It's the hardest joke I ever sat on," he said, and revealed the tortoise.

"Kee-hee-hee!" Henry guffawed loudly.

"Young feller," said Erasmus, "this joke has back-fired and hit me in a tender spot." He put the tortoise down on the floor and moved toward Henry. "I'm going to take you and hold you under the water till you bubble, and then—"

But Henry was through the doorway by that time, and Whauple, wasting no more breath, darted out after him. Marshall, grabbing his linen towel, got outside in time to see Henry racing madly up the terrace edge, with Whauple in hot pursuit. Then, Henry, knowing he could not go much farther that way without being trapped, took a header into the river, and went swimming away up-stream. Whauple, unwilling to wet his costume by going in after him, danced along the bank level with the swimmer, telling him what he might expect when he came out.

Marshall stood watching; already the two had passed the stone storehouses against the cliff, and Henry, swimming strongly, was making good headway toward the crab-slide against the current, though he would be forced to return for his promised ducking in the end. Suddenly Marshall heard the note in Whauple's voice change from bantering play to dead earnest as he called to Henry.

"Here, you young idiot—come back! Do you want to rouse the valley? Come back!"

Even as he called, the great gong of the look-out sent forth the alarm—Henry's swimming had been mistaken for an attempt at escape. The deep, tremendous note boomed its warning to the valley, and Whauple leaped back to the shelter of the storehouses as a rumbling that seemed to shake the hill announced that the look-out man had loosed one of his boulders to shatter itself and kill any who attempted egress by way of the terrace toward the crab-slide.

Marshall, on the bank farther down stream, saw Henry turn and dive as the great mass hurtled down; it struck the terrace with a crash at which the whole earth seemed to quiver; splinters of rock sang through the air, but the main mass of the boulder, unbroken, bounced like a rubber ball and fell full on the outer containing wall of the river bed, and under the impact near on twenty feet of the raised bed of the stream crumbled and fell away—the effect of the falling rock was as if an enormous gouge had been driven slantingly through the edge of a gigantic cheese.

It was all a matter of seconds, and from where he stood Marshall could see clearly what happened. Half deafened by the two tremendous crashes as the great boulder struck, first on the rock terrace and then on the shaped wall that formed the river bank, he saw the waters of the stream pour down to the valley in a thirty-foot cascade—he knew at once that the breach in the aqueduct was irreparable. He saw Henry, struggling desperately, sucked into the new waterfall, and watched helplessly while the boy was flung down to his death where the torrent struck the valley floor below.

The noise of the gong, suddenly ceasing, left the roar of the new cataract to make uncontested, terrible music, while the silent men with their bows and arrows came running up to their posts. Then came Milu, also running, to question what had happened, but when he saw the breach in the river wall he paused and flung up his hands with a helpless gesture. Whauple went to him and explained, pointing to his chamber and to the river bank, and then leading Milu to the edge to point down at the place where, flung out from the waters, Henry's body lay.

Where Marshall stood, the rock channel of the river was already exposed; all the volume of the stream poured over the newly made fall, down into the valley of silent men. Whauple came up to Marshall and looked at him in a scared way. "You better go and get dressed," he said. "Henry—he didn't mean—"

"Poor Henry's dead," Marshall answered, and turned away from the river brink. "That fall smashed the life out of him—I saw him sucked down and over."

He went back to their chamber, Whauple with him. He stood, facing Whauple. "You know what it means?" he asked.

Erasmus nodded. His face was pale beneath its tan.

"There's tons of water going into the valley every second, and no power on earth can stop it in time," Marshall said. "By tonight, probably, or by tomorrow at latest, every tree of the fields of sleep will be under water—the scent drowned. In three days time not a man of these people will be left alive, unless they can transplant their trees and keep them alive."

"They can't," Whauple said. "Tari-Hi told me—I asked him why some of the trees weren't planted up here, in case the groves down there should get blighted or anything. They won't live as high above sea level as this—they're in the lowest parts of the valley, and must have moisture and not too much sun—like cocoa plantations. The haze over the valley—it's a natural protection for 'em."

The two notes of the gong rang out, as signal for dismissal after the alarm, before he had finished dressing. When he was ready, he went out again with Whauple. Tari-Hi and Milu, with a score or more of the silent men, stood opposite to the breach in the river wall, watching helplessly—they could do nothing, and knew it. Down in the valley, beyond the river, hundreds of the silent people stood looking up at the cataract.

"They have three days to live—three days at the most," Whauple said.

HE WENT straight to Milu and asked a question. Milu gestured as if in agreement with him, and gave an order at which half a dozen of the silent men went away. By their faces, it seemed that they had not yet realized the full significance of this catastrophe.

"I asked him to send us food—stacks of it," Whauple told Marshall. "When these people have gone to sleep, we shall want a store to see us through. Better git it in while we can."

Marshall nodded, and moved up to stand beside Tari-Hi, who regarded him with grave concern.

"This is a terrible thing, Tari-Hi," he said.

"It is the end, Mar-shal," Tari-Hi answered. "Milu has told me how it chanced, through your servant and Rasmi at play. Yet some time that boulder must have fallen and broken away the river-bed—it is the end."

"Is there no remedy?" Marshall asked.

Tari-Hi shook his head. "None. My people—" He broke off there, and stood looking toward the valley, with his face averted from Marshall's sight. The haze of normal days had not yet fallen to shut in the fields of sleep—probably the water of the river, flowing down into the valley, prevented the steamy mists from rising—and they could see the stream forming pools, creeping on a little way, forming more pools, and creeping on again. Already the flood had reached the edge of the nearest patch of white-flowering shrub.

"Can nothing save them?" Marshall asked again.

"Nothing," Tari-Hi answered, with utter finality. "The tree of sleep will cease to be—they with it. Milu and his children, Aia and I—we only shall remain. These others will fall asleep."

"And we two—Rasmi and I?"

Tari-Hi turned and looked full at him, with a curious expression. "Will go to your own people," he said, slowly—reluctantly, Marshall thought. "The guarding of the valley is ended; and we have no longer the power to hold you. Yet, Marshal, as I have treated you, so treat me. Not I alone held you, but the law of the valley—from me has no harm come to you, and from Milu none. Remember this, until you go."

"My pledge on it," Marshall answered. "We bear you no grudge, Tari-Hi, but have understood from the first."

"Milu, send these men of the valley back to their place," Tari-Hi bade, "and after, come to me. We shall meet again, Marshal."

He turned away. Marshall and Whauple went back to their chamber in the rock, to find their day's food already awaiting them. Whauple sat down on his bed.

"Poor old Henry—to think I'd nearly forgotten him already!" he said.

"We ought to recover his body and bury it," Marshall suggested.

Whauple shook his head sadly. "Impossible," he answered. "I liked that lad—he was the likeliest Eurasian ever came my way. And to think that him and his little tortoise—Marshall, there's Clement down there, sentenced with the rest."

"Doomed with the rest," Marshall amended.

"Lucky we've got his statement," Whauple remarked.

Almost as he spoke they heard a distant crack, and then another. "More bits of rock falling—the water's eating away the cracked parts," Whauple commented. But, as they ate, slowly and without much appetite, two nearer reports sounded, and Whauple started up.

"Clement—Milu—you remember—" he ejaculated, and rushed out, the remains of a half-eaten meal cake forgotten in his hand.

Marshall followed to see Clement emerge from Milu's doorway with his revolver in his hand. Then Whauple came up to Clement, wrenched the revolver from his grasp after a brief struggle, in which the weapon exploded once and a bullet made a white splash on the cliff. Unarmed, Clement ceased to struggle, and faced Marshall as he came with an old odd look of triumph. He gave vent to his awful, soundless laugh.

"Milu killed my child," he whispered. "Milu and his children are dead—it is only justice. Now I will go back to Marie—give me my pistol."

But Whauple shook his head. "Not us," he said, menacingly. "You've done enough murders, young feller. If you weren't as good as dead yourself, I'd kill you now."

Clement ignored him, and held out his hand to Marshall. "Good-by," he wheezed. "You can have Aia—I wouldn't."

But Marshall put his hands behind his back; Clement turned away with an affectation of indifference, and went toward the bamboo bridge that led from the plateau down into the valley of silent men.

"Mad—hatter mad," Whauple commented. He went within Milu's chamber, and emerged almost immediately. "I wish I'd shot him—Lord but I wish I'd shot him!" he exclaimed, grinding his teeth with rage. "He's blown those two poor little beggars' heads in."

He took one step as if to go down the plateau after Clement, but Marshall grasped his wrist. "No," he said, "Come back, Whauple—come back and think. Clement is one little item—don't you realize what this is?"

Whauple stood staring; the dread music of the new cataract came to them; Marshall thought of the people of the silent valley as of condemned ones listening to the opening chords of their requiem. The waters lapped round the stems of their mysterious trees, and rose inexorably as the minutes fled.

"The end of the world will be like this," Whauple said, in an awed voice.

"Will they suffer?" Marshall asked.

Whauple shook his head. "One by one they will fall asleep," he answered. "When all the trees are drowned, and there is no more scent—one by one they will fall asleep."

They stood for minutes; the magnitude of the disaster appalled them, prevented clear thought. That Henry was killed, that they might go back when they would—these things were nothing to them, as yet.

"One by one they will fall asleep," Marshall repeated at last.

"I have seen," Whauple amplified. "It was a man who stayed up here—away from the scent—too long. He went drowsy, as if he had been drugged, and before he could get to the bridge to go back to the valley he fell down unconscious—it was like I once saw a man overcome by escape of gas. And they couldn't waken him again—nothing could waken him till he'd been carried down into the scent of the trees, so that he could breathe it in again. He recovered, then, they said."

They had taken no note of the passing of time, and now the sun, high over head, beat down on the valley; there was a quivering spray rainbow at the foot of the new waterfall, as they could see when they went near the dried bed of the river below the breach in its wall. Here and there one of the fish for which Whauple had angled so patiently, stranded by the receded waters, lay glistening on the ooze where the stream had flowed, or flapped convulsively at intervals. Whauple pointed down at one.

"That's how they will die," he said.

AFTER a time they went down past the point where the terrace widened, on to the plateau. There was no sign of Tari-Hi or of Aia, but they passed the body of Milu, lying face downward where Clement had shot him. Whauple pointed. "Shot him from behind, the bloody cur," he said. "Milu was a good friend to me."

In half-a-dozen of the beds of shrubs on the plateau, near the bamboo bridge by which one might cross the river and go down to the valley, silent men dug desperately, flinging out plants and trees; others brought across the bridge strange cactus-like plants, with muddy earth adhering to their roots, and each of these plants was about the height of a man. In form, they were not unlike the species of cactus

which bears the prickly pear, with big, fleshy, oval excresences for leaves, rich olive green in colour, and each of these leaves was flecked with white blossoms not unlike a large sort of narcissus bloom, but with heavier, more fleshy-looking petals.

The flowers grew out from the leaves, cactus-wise, and not from separate stems. A light western breeze enabled Marshall and Whauple to approach quite near the plants without inhaling their scent, and the silent men took no notice of their approach, but went on working feverishly. They planted their trees carefully in the turned-up earth, and shaded them from the sun by arranging boughs from the shrubs they had displaced over them, but even as they worked the heavy leaves began to sag and droop. Other of the silent people watched this bid for life, fearfully, despairingly.

"It's no use, and they know it," Whauple remarked. "By tonight these plants will have sagged to rotting pulp, and by tomorrow night the last of the flowers will begin to wither. And the scent's not strong enough to keep the silent people alive, with the wind up here blowing it away from them."

A tiny boy, not more than five years old, danced gleefully over the bamboo bridge, and stood as if overcome by the marvels of the plateau, his face a silent laughter in itself at this wonderful new world of colour and bright sunshine. He ran to where the silent men laboured, and then a woman, her face pain-contorted, rushed out from the bridge and caught him. She gathered him in her arms in an agony of unavailing mother-love, and carried him back across the bridge; they could see the mischief in his merry eyes as he looked over her shoulder.

Marshall looked down into the sunken valley; there was no haze over it—the flood had prevented the mists from rising out of its fields. A great sheet of water gleamed in the sun, and above its surface showed dark patches, white specked—the fields of sleep, at the lowest level of the valley, were first to be inundated. In the shallow water men dug to rescue more trees, that they might carry them up to the plateau—it was like grasping at useless straws, but hope is ever the last driving force to fail.

Whauple turned to Marshall. "There's nothing to be done—we can't do anything," he remarked.

"They will fall asleep," Marshall said, speaking the words which repeated themselves over and over in his brain. "One by one they will fall asleep."

"What about us, though?" Whauple asked suddenly.

"We are free to go," Marshall answered. "Tari-Hi told me—but if the silent people are doomed, we can't go while one of them remains alive. The one might be Clement, and we must take back fact—certainty, not rumour."

"And we've got to fake something to get us past the crabs—it's our only way out, unless we drop over the wall," Whauple reflected. "Let's go and see what grub we've got."

They went back to their chamber, and found that baskets of cooked goat meat and piles of meal cakes had been placed there, by what was probably the last order Milu had given before Clement murdered him. Except for this, the chamber was as they had left it; the remains of their half-eaten breakfasts were on the three-legged stools beside their couches; the silent men had not come in to tidy up, as on normal days—they would come no more, Marshall knew.

A little tortoise came slowly out from under Marshall's bed, and Whauple picked it up. "You—you—freedom for us and a couple of thousand deaths, and you're responsible," he apostrophized it. "Run away while you're safe."

For a long time they sat without speaking. The dulled murmur of falling waters came steadily to their ears; and Marshall thought of the shifting spray rainbow at the foot of the torrent, and of the happy, unknowing child in its mother's arms. They were side issues in a thing which, though it affected only this small settlement of the silent people, had in it elements which made it rank as a great tragedy.

Their own small problem, that of returning to the outer world, seemed incredibly remote. Here was plenty of food, no immediate urgency—and then he recollected the stored gold in the ancient mine. Yes, that belonged to Tari-Hi, if to anyone; Tari-Hi had treated them fairly, and they could hardly rob him, adding blatant insult to disaster.

A series of colossal, earth-shaking crashes brought them to their feet and out through the doorway of the chamber. Some way up the terrace stood Tari-Hi, watching while the look-out man sent down his rounded boulders one by one—Marshall comprehended as soon as he saw what was

happening; Tari-Hi hoped that one of the boulders might roll into the channel of the river above the breach in its wall, to block the stream so that its volume might be diverted on to the terrace. If this could have been accomplished, it would have given a chance of repairing the breach made by the first boulder, but as each mass fell it shattered to singing, shrapnel-like fragments.

Only the one rock which had done the damage proved hard enough to withstand the shock of falling without shattering, and when the last of these had been sent down, Tari-Hi turned from watching and came down toward the plateau. He looked grave, but no more than normally so, and he carried himself with his usual stately dignity, recognising Marshall by a slight inclination of his head, and pausing when he came abreast of the two.

"It is free to you to go, Mar-shal and Rasmi," he said. "It may be that you will choose to go today."

THE irony in his voice was that of a man whom fate has beaten, but who would never own defeat as final. Marshall gestured dissent.

"No," he answered, "and if we might offer you service, any aid that we could give—"

"My guests, the valley is past aid," Tari-Hi answered, with one of his rare smiles, "for I have but now tried to block the stream—it was a last hope. Yet I will set that offer in my mind as speaking the regard kings should show to kings. And it came to my mind, Mar-shal—there is a small store of gold that Aia showed you in our mine. You may bear it away with you, if you will."

"As the gift of a king to his guests," Marshall answered.

"It may be, too, that you and Rasmi will come to my place at sunset, that we may eat and talk together once more before you go," Tari-Hi offered further, looking from one to the other.

"We will come," Marshall promised for both. He was curious to know what Tari-Hi would do, now that cessation of food supplies from the valley rendered the plateau untenable for any length of time.

"We shall await you," Tari-Hi said, and passed on.

Marshall and Whauple went back to their chamber, and Whauple looked round. "I wonder if Crusoe felt like I do when he left his island," he reflected aloud. "I've been here so long—so damned long, and to think we're going back— Really going back, Marshall—"

He sat down on his couch. "I'd give anything to get poor old Henry back. Him and his tortoise—"

After another silence he looked across at Marshall. "What does that gold amount to?" he asked.

"As much as we can carry, if not more," Marshall answered. "It's dust—we must cut up some goatskin to make bags to carry it —make it up into little parcels to sling on ourselves. It will slow our pace considerably, but I think we ought to take it, now that Tari-Hi has offered it to us as a gift."

"Leave your share if you like—I want mine," Whauple responded.

After a time of brooding he lay down for his midday siesta. Marshall went out and over to the river bank; down in the valley the forming lake looked no larger, but one small patch of trees of sleep that he had observed in the morning had already disappeared. On the plateau he saw that the silent men still dug and brought trees up from the valley and across the bridge, planting them in the soil from which they rooted out other trees. Milu's body had been taken away, he noted—coagulated blood still marked the place where he had died, and Marshall, in seeing it, wondered if Tari-Hi would try to take vengeance on Clement for the murder.

From that he passed to thought of Clement, who had given life for a year in the valley with the wife whose beauty outshone Aia's, in Aia's own opinion—without seeing Marie, Marshall disagreed with that estimate of her charm. Clement had given life for a year with her, and more than life, for no right-thinking man could have done children to death because a law pressed hardly on him. Voluntarily and for his own pleasure he had made himself one with the people of the valley, subject to their laws, and then had taken advantage of confusion to murder because of the administration of those laws. He was, as Whauple had said, mad.

Marshall went back to the chamber. They ought to be making preparations for departure, packing—but he had no heart to prepare as yet. The sense of catastrophe was too stunning in its effect, the threat of extinction that hung over the silent people was so awful a thing, that he wanted only to get over this shock of realization. Silent children, like the merry little boy he had seen. . . . The price of his and Whauple's freedom was two thousand lives—that was what it amounted to, though they were

innocent of taking of any of those lives.

He lay down on his couch and looked across at its empty fellow, where Henry used to lie—the rag of linen in which Henry had wrapped the tortoise of his joke was still on the floor where Whauple had dropped it.

"If only we could do something!" Whauple exclaimed suddenly. "Somehow, it don't seem right to go after that gold or try the crab-slide while these poor devils are fighting for their lives. Not that there's any hurry for us, but—

"If only we could do something!"

Outside the chamber the cataract roared, a dulled, terrible note, and Marshall thought of the flood in the valley, rising, steadily rising, over the trees of sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BOOTS ARE TAKEN DOWN

BY THE hour of sunset, when Marshall and Whauple went across the plateau in response to Tari-Hi's invitation, the futility of the silent men's attempt at transplanting their trees was fully apparent. Such trees as had been set in the soil of the plateau had sagged to utter shapelessness; it was evident that the whole growth, from the root upward, was of the same fleshy nature as the leaves—there was no hard trunk or stem to support the weight of the branches, and the untempered sunlight beating on it at this different height—perhaps, too, the dry openness of the plateau after the humidity of the valley—was too much for the trees. None of the silent people were visible; they had given up the attempt at occupying the plateau.

There were four skin-covered couches set round the table in Tari-Hi's chamber, and all was as when Marshall had first seen it, except for Drua's absence. Marshall had posted Whauple with regard to the etiquette of seating, and Tari-Hi performed the ceremony of sprinkling wine on the floor before him. They sat, and ate and drank, with a certain tension, saying little at first—Whauple hardly spoke at all, and was obviously ill at ease, though he comported himself in a way that surprised Marshall, who had feared lest Erasmus should commit some small solecisms in this unwonted atmosphere.

"Tomorrow," Tari-Hi observed at last, "you will turn westward to your own place and people, Rásmi and Mar-shal. Hence, before you go, I asked you to come to me, not only in proof of amity, but to ask of you silence with regard to the valley and the cause of its guarding."

"Silence?" Whauple echoed. "There is nothing to cause us to speak."

"There is some store of gold that I have given you," Tari-Hi pursued. "If knowledge of the place that yielded the gold went out by reason of aught that you two might say, many men would come to the valley, though on a vain quest. So I ask you—say no word of the place whence the gold was won, when you return among your own people. For though the silent people perish, Aia and I, who swore the oath of governance, remain, bound by the oath."

Marshall looked from one to the other. "You two remain here?" he asked, incredulously.

Tari-Hi smiled faintly. "I said that we two remain," he corrected. "Milu and his are killed by that one who went to the valley, but we two remain—alive."

"On that point I would have spoken with you," Marshall said. "You are a man among men—come with us two, and with Aia, to a place where you may find friends and shelter. We will direct you, gladly."

"I would come gladly, were I free to choose," Tari-Hi answered, "but we go our own ways, as you go yours, Mar-shal and Rasmi. We who have ruled here are free of an old wisdom, masters of many things beyond your knowing—and in you I have seen one fit to rank with us. Hence I speak with you as now I speak, and not as with that one who went to the valley, whom Aia, here, showed us at his true worth."

"That one we came to find," Marshall commented, grave at the thought of how their quest had ended.

"In a day he is as his fellows, gone on to shaping in other worlds," Tari-Hi said solemnly. "While we four sit, they in the valley hear the noise of the falling waters as the voice of an enemy in triumph, not knowing that death, whom they deem enemy, is man's friend. And my regret, as we four sit, is that until man's friend comes to me I shall no more look on your faces, Mar-shal and Rasmi."

Whauple filled one of the drinking cups from a flask, and, standing, held it aloft. He spoke in the language of the valley, which gave his utterance a certain simple dignity.

"Tari-Hi," he said, "there is among us a custom, to drink wine before a man as sign that we honour him. This to you, king of the silent men today, king of the dead

tomorrow, but always a just man and one worth regard. And to you, Aia, whose beauty queens might envy."

"Wait, Whauple, that I too may drink," Marshall bade.

He filled a cup, and, rising to his feet, held it up. "This to you two, Tari-Hi and Aia," he said. "If life should draw us together again, count me as friend. Like Rasmi, I was an unwilling guest, but never once have I questioned your good will. Believe that you have mine."

They drank, and seated themselves again. For a time no word was spoken; their meal was finished, and in the dead silence a faint, far-off murmur came to them, telling how that which Tari-Hi had named man's friend marched on toward the people of the valley.

Aia had spoken scarcely a word since they entered. She sat facing Marshall, but hardly looked at him until, at the end of this silence, she rose and left the three men together, going to an inner chamber without any word of farewell or explanation. A moment later, Tari-Hi rose too.

"Count this our parting," he bade, "yet I will walk with you a little way toward your own place."

He moved toward the entrance, and Whauple followed. Marshall, pausing irresolutely for a seond at the thought of leaving Aia thus, followed after Whauple, but as he passed through the doorway Aia came beside him silently and laid her hand on his arm. Tari-Hi and Whauple went on, but Aia led Marshall away out toward the bamboo settee, and there paused, facing him in the starlight.

"I said that I had all the years, Marshal," she told him, "and now I have not even one hour."

Infinite sadness was in the words; her eyes looked closely into his own, appealing, questioning, more glorious in this hour than when inscrutable through certainty. And for Marshall there was a difference in the relation in which she stood to him; she was no longer inevitable fate, threatening as alternative to the hope of return to the world he knew, but the loveliest flower of womanhood he had met—and now must let go her way.

"Aia," he said, gently. "Aia!"

The name itself was a caress. The white wonder of her left him capable of no further utterance, for he saw, as she had foretold, that she could give greater sweetness to life than could the fragrance of the flower of sleep. He took her hands and kissed them, lifting each in turn, and then he raised them so that they lay on his shoulders.

"You who spoke of action as all of life—you forgot love," Aia said, and there was music in the words. "Man of mine—is action all?"

There was some underlying motive in the questions that he could not answer nor define. She seemed to hint at something beyond his knowledge, and he waited for the question to declare itself. With her hands on his shoulders as he had placed them, holding herself away from him, she spoke again.

"There is an old wisdom that is of more power, even, than gold, Mar-shal, and in my hands lies its key. As you asked of my father, so I ask of you. Let Rasmi return alone, be one with us, as you would have had us be at one with you, and I who stand before you promise there shall be greater reward than can come to you among your own people."

HE REMEMBERED the cold flame on the altar, the wonderful faces that looked down from above the flame. He felt the touch of her hands, saw the promise in her eyes, and with freedom in his grasp wavered from grasping, for it was Aia who asked, promised, and she promised a world whose wonder he saw, faintly, in the light of her eyes. Yet he forced himself to answer—

"Like you, Aia, I must go my way—I am not free to choose."

Her hands dropped at sides, limply. "This I saw when I called on the flame for guidance," she said, with infinite sadness in the words. "It was shown me that water should divide us two—I feared lest it was meant that you should cross the river to the valley, as did that other, but the water that divides us destroys the valley."

"But for that, Aia," he answered, "it seems that your foretelling would have come true."

"It was not the way that I willed, when I foretold," she said, "but the way I saw as destiny, resistless, less desired for its sureness. Thus was it with me then, Mar-shal, but now . . . when you go out to your own people, forgetting, my thought will follow you. When the days in the valley are old memories, if at earth's end you whisper my name, your whisper will echo into my dreams. I was as one asleep till in your hour of despair you grasped and so wakened me—and even as I am wakened, so would I have wakened you, man of mine. Were I not bound, I would have

gone with you as you asked, but the pledge that binds is proof that life must conquer love. This I say to you, knowing that you go to forgetfulness among your own people."

"Not to forgetfulness, Aia," he answered.

She smiled, and in the smile was more sadness than in any expression of hers that he had seen.

"Life rules, Mar-shal," she said. "When we two stand face to face in light, as now we stand in darkness, we shall know why these things were. Until that day dawns on us, farewell."

She turned from him and went back. He fought down the impulse to call to her, and, when she had passed through the doorway, went slowly up the plateau to find Whauple waiting for him outside their chamber.

"Aia?" Whauple asked.

"Yes," Marshal answered, gravely.

"Heartbroken—I could see it," Whauple said. "But—"

After a minute he turned and went within the chamber, and Marshall followed him, without speaking.

* * *

When, a little after dawn, they went down to the edge of the dried river bed, they saw that the lake in the valley had increased its size considerably in the night, and the white-flowering plants had all disappeared, now. There was no haze over the valley, and though they looked long and carefully they could see no sign of people moving round such of the huts as showed.

"Of course," Whauple said. "Panic kept them at it yesterday till they were worn out with work and fright, and in the end they went to sleep. Most of 'em will never wake up again."

"It looks like it," Marshall answered. "There was no haze yesterday—the sun was blazing into the valley all day—"

"And it wilted the trees of sleep," Whauple concluded. "Wonder if Clement's awake?"

Clement slept, they found. Out on the plateau, to leeward of some of the transplanted, dead trees of sleep—they were pulpy, shrunken masses, now—a score or more of the silent men lay, breathing stertorously, and among them was Clement.

They shook the recumbent forms insistently, tried every means they could devise in the hope of wakening them, but in vain: the sleepers gave no sign of returning consciousness.

"No use," Whauple remarked at last, "and worse than no use. They'd only remember till they went to sleep again, if they waked up."

Marshall looked down at Clement, wondering what had become of Marie—had Clement, at the last, lacked courage to stay with her in the valley until sleep should come to them there? Whauple, kneeling, took two rings from Clement's fingers.

"Evidence, for his poor old mother," he explained.

They went in search of Tari-Hi and Aia. Outside Tari-Hi's doorway they called to him, but there was no response. They entered, went through the four apartments which led out from the main chamber, calling at the doorway of each, and finding them empty when they entered. In one Marshall saw such a gold clasp as Aia had worn to draw in her hair at the nape of her neck, and the consciousness that he was standing in her room gave him an odd sense of her presence, as if her personality still pervaded the place. He questioned the decision he had made—could he go out from this place, and leave her?

He was determined, now, to find her and Tari-Hi, to see them again. With Whauple he searched the shaded paths of the plateau, went up to the foot of the crab-slide, and returned, at intervals calling, and searching in any place where they might be—but there was no sign of them anywhere. In mid-morning he and Whauple went across the bamboo bridge, to see that the made causeway which sloped steeply down from the far end of bridge into the silent valley was already submerged at its lower end, though how deeply they could not tell.

"He said it was good-by, last night, and they've gone," Whauple said.

"Where—where could they go?" Marshall asked.

"Ask Tari-Hi—ask Aia," Whauple answered. "We're not likely to know—Tari-Hi was a clever old bird, and kept his own secrets."

Then Marshall remembered that strange temple of cold flame. "A place of refuge made for us who rule. . . it is only to us who have taken the oath of guardianship that our last hold may be known," Aia had told him.

He knew, now, that he could not let her go, thus. In thought he saw her, framed in the light of moonrise over the

far-off sea, wonderful; he heard again the note in her voice—"When I creep to your arms and feel their welcome it will be with a smile—" As she had foretold, he looked back to that first day to find it golden, and in the finding knew that Aia held in her keeping for him more than life could ever offer again.

He went across the plateau and stood, as nearly as recollection pointed, before the invisible entrance to the temple—

"Aia—Aia—Marshall calls you! Aia—Aia!"

But, for response, the towering cliff gave him back his own words' echo. Aia and Tari-Hi had gone, holding inviolate the last secret of the valley.

ALL that day they worked, packing the gold, and before sunset they closed the entrance to the old mine and carried the gold up to their chamber. Planning as they worked, they decided to take the bamboo poles which made side rails to the bridge across the river bed, and with them construct a ladder for the ascent of the crab-slide. When they had finished transporting the gold, they came down to the bridge, and found that only two of the silent men who lay out on the plateau still breathed; Clement was one of those who breathed no more.

"We've still got to get past the crabs," Whauple remarked, as they tore the bamboo rails loose from their fastenings.

"That's where the rest of the goat meat will come in," Marshall answered. "The crabs are some way from the top of the slide, as I remember them. We take up the baskets of meat—it will be putrid by tomorrow, and they'll scent it as soon as the wind takes it over to them—and we make a run for it, from the top of the slide. As soon as the crabs come out after us, start shedding bits of meat around, like feeding chickens. While they're quarrelling over the spoil, we get away—they won't follow far."

"It's a shaky chance," Whauple objected.

"Then find a better way through them," Marshall suggested, and Erasmus objected no more.

"We might wait a day or two, in case Tari-Hi and Aia turned up again," Marshall suggested, while they were busy constructing their ladder from bamboo and strips of goatskin.

"And starve for our pains," Whauple retorted. "Tari-Hi knows his business as well as we know ours—he gave us that gold to get rid of us in a friendly way, and went—he knows where, and we can't know."

Recalling Aia's farewell, Marshall knew the truth of Whauple's words. And yet. . . .

"We've enough grub for three days," Erasmus pursued, "and then we can tighten our belts and keep on tightening till we shoot pig or something of the sort. So far as stopping here is concerned, nuthin' doin'. Yours faithfully, Erasmus Whauple. P.S.—Stop here if you like—I'm for the road."

They took their half-finished ladder up to the crab-slide before the light failed them, and left it there for completion in the morning, after assuring themselves that it was long enough to take them to the top. At just on sunset they went and looked into the valley from the river brink—the waters still poured down in unabated volume through the breach in the rock.

"It's a strong stream for country like this," Whauple remarked, "and that valley will go on filling for weeks, until it's one big lake, level with the river bed. It'll take weeks to get to that level, and then the water will go over the cliff at the far end, same as before."

"Pretty much as it was before the artificial river bed was cut," Marshall remarked, absently.

"Perhaps," Whauple said, "though I don't think it came nearly as close to the mine entrance—else they'd never have troubled to cut the channel. There'll be dead bodies floating by the hundred—"

"It is a terrible thing," Marshall said.

"It had to end, some day," Whauple concluded, "and it happened to end in ours."

Tired though he was by the day's work—for they had not rested since the morning—it was long before Marshall could get to sleep. He heard Whauple's even breathing, and thought of how they would set out on the morrow, of Aia and Tari-Hi vanished so inexplicably, of Clement lying dead, of Pierre with whom they must deal in Sapelung, of Clement's mother, of Stephanie away in England, of Aia, with her voice of music and eyes that promised a world of love. . . . Aia . . . . His last waking thought.

Sleeping at last, he dreamed that Aia bent over him, knelt beside him. In the dream he stretched out his arms and drew her down toward him until her lips rested on his own, more lightly than the fallen petals of a flower, with more sweetness than was in the fragrance of the flowers of sleep. He felt her tears wet on his face,

and heard her whisper—"Man of mine, farewell!"

Wakening to full consciousness, he heard Whauple's untroubled breathing, and could not believe that there was no other in the place, so vivid had been the impression of her presence. "Aia!" he called, gently. "Aia!"

But it was a dream, of course.

Yet, when light came into the chamber in the morning, he found on his pillow one long, shining, black strand of hair—there was but one little head in all the world from which it could have fallen, he knew.

Erasmus, wakening, rubbed his eyes, yawned, and sat up. Very deliberately, he got out from his couch and went over to the shelf at the back of the chamber. He pulled down some dusty garments and shook them out, and then, with almost solemn slowness, as if it were a religious rite, he took his greased boots down from the shelf.

A LITTLE later, in the throat of the pass, Marshall turned and looked back. At the farthest limit of vision he saw the two flat-topped hills which Henry had first pointed out to him, and away to the left was a line of green that marked the beginnings of the river—the river whose waters went down to make a lake where once had been the fields of sleep. Beside him, Erasmus Whauple, also pausing, looked down toward Sapelung.

They were gaunt and dirty, and Marshall looked ill. His evil-smelling ointment had rendered them immune from the attentions of mosquitoes, but he had contracted a low sort of fever in the moist, hot stretches of the jungle, from which he recovered but slowly; over a month had passed since they came up the crab-slide, and to Marshall it seemed much longer. There was something emblematic of their respective states of mind in that he looked back, now that they paused, toward the valley, while Erasmus looked forward to Sapelung.

"Where did they go, Whauple—where are they?" he asked, for the hundredth time.

Whauple, keeping in mind that his companion was still querulous and ill, not yet his normal self, answered for the hundredth time.

"Tari-Hi knew how to count up to five—wherever they went, they're all right, you may be sure."

Except for a few hours when Marshall had been slightly light-headed, neither he nor Whauple mentioned Aia's name; always they said "they" or "Tari-Hi."

"You got any money in Sapelung?" Whauple asked suddenly.

"Between two and three hundred—credit notes at the bank," Marshall answered. "Why—do you want some?"

"Lend me a hundred till we square up with Clement's mother—we don't want to touch that gold till we get away from this place. I left three hundred with my old mother in Balham, to see her through, and reckoned to complete this contract on the other two I got."

"Certainly—you can have a hundred," Marshall agreed.

"Lord, to think of using money again! Real eggs and bacon, and a shirt with a tail to it. Iced drinks—"

Marshall took a last look at the twin hills, took up the pack which he had put down, and faced toward the incline which led down to Sapelung.

"Pierre," he said, significantly.

* * *

Mr. Flatwell, deputy assistant governor, perused Clement's signed statement carefully, and looked up from it at the two men to whom he had condescended to grant an interview, after they had a course of minor officials to make them duly cognizant of Mr. Flatwell's greatness. He was the all-too-common type of official which starts with the assumption that the term "Government servant" is a mistake—the latter part of it, that is. He would admit, if pressed on the point, that he was an official, but never that he was a servant.

"Very interesting—very interesting indeed, Mr.—er—Mr. Marshall—or should I address myself to Mr. Whauple?"

"Either, or both," Erasmus answered promptly. "The point is as insignificant as we are—quite immaterial."

Mr. Flatwell gave him a suspicious glance, and confined his attention to Marshall, though Erasmus was perfectly respectful in his manner.

"Well, Mr. Marshall," he pursued, judicially, "it is very interesting, and also extremely libellous—extremely libellous. Where is this Clement Delarey, the author of the document?"

"Dead," Marshall answered, and Whauple nodded concurrence.

The sandy, bald little man before them elevated his eyebrows, pursed his lips, and handed the document back to Marshall.

"Then this—er—this interesting story,

with only the signature or Mr. Whauple as a witness, is most distinctly libellous. I—er—I assure you that this interview will be treated by me as in strict confidence, gentlemen, and I can assure you that no words of the—er—the matter with which it is concerned—er—shall ever pass my lips. Mr. Pierre Delarey is a very able and highly respected member of our little community here, and I would be the last to take any part in a scandal that might pain him on such unsubstantial grounds."

He chose his words with great care, and seemed very proud of the English of his sentences. Whauple murmured something about a hambone, and Marshall rose to his feet.

"The names of two Chinamen are given in that statement," he said. "Will you at least have them interrogated?"

"No," said Mr. Flatwell, politely but very firmly. "If we who are responsible for the efficiency of government here chose to take up every story of this kind that came to us, we—er—we should not have any time for—er—for work."

"I accuse Pierre Delarey of attempting to murder me—procuring one of those Chinamen to do it!" Whauple broke in angrily. "Will that move you to act?"

"It will move you—out of this room," Mr. Flatwell answered, and rapidly put the width of a big table between himself and his callers. "My time is fully occupied, gentlemen—I must ask you to go before you accuse me of attempted murder of either of you. At once, please."

They complied, realizing that Government House had no aid to give them. When they had gone Mr. Flatwell sat down and wiped away perspiration—it was an exceedingly hot morning, and in addition to that he had been badly scared—and for fifteen minutes of his valuable time sat reassuring himself by firing out repetitions of a word, like minute guns.

"Ridiculous!" he exploded, loaded himself again, and again exploded—"Ridiculous!"

"You see," Whauple remarked, "the official mind is about as much use as a plate of boiled cabbage is to a man-eating tiger. That cock-eyed, ginger-haired, freckle-faced, squab-nosed monster has been in his little job so long that the end of his nose is the limit of his sight, and Pierre Delarey is a damn good chap—probably stands lunches at the club to the mugs from Government House, and quite likely lends 'em money if they want it. Blast the official mind, anyhow!"

"Which does not forward our case," Marshall reflected.

"After all, we've done our job," Whauple urged, "all but reporting to Clement's mother and collecting the other five hundred apiece due to us, if the old lady'll part. Why worry?"

Marshall did not respond immediately. They tramped on toward Mrs. Martinez' boarding establishment, where Marshall had installed himself and Whauple, since it was inconspicuous.

"Let me see," he said at last, in meditative tone, "what were the names of those two Chinaman?"

"Wong Lee and Ping Yang," Whauple answered, "but they may be in Peking—or in hell—by now."

"They may also be in Sapelung," Marshall said, thoughtfully. "Do you happen to know anything about the police here?"

Whauple looked at him curiously. "Haven't had time," he answered. "I've got a clean sheet in this place—not a single drunk against me."

"Find me a police inspector," Marshall asked. "He must be young, ambitious, nourished on Sherlock Holmes and similar works for preference—a man with an imagination and willing to take a chance if there's a promise of promotion about it. Find me an inspector like that, and I'll make that idiot Flatwell look like the expired half of a return ticket before we leave this paradise of fools. D'you think we'll go and leave that—all you called him, and then some, sitting on his government perch preening himself?"

"Not by a flagon or so," Erasmus responded heartily. "Sit tight for a day or two, and I'll catch you your slop-worrier."

They had not advertised their return in any way, but, on the third day after they had tramped into Sapelung, and deposited a locked portmanteau containing sundry heavy packages under the care of the bank manager, Pierre Delarey dropped down to Mrs. Martinez' establishment—down in the social sense, for a Eurasian-kept boarding house was hardly in his line—and asked if Mr. Whauple or Mr. Walker were in. The two hesitated over it, and then—"Show him round, Mrs. Martinez," Marshall said.

PIERRE, shown round to their side of the verandah, looked from one to the other. "I understand you have changed your name, Mr. Walker," he said to Marshall, and then, coolly—"How do you do, Whauple?"

"I have finished walking—to Mah-Eng and back," Marshall answered. "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you—no," Pierre responded, with the curt air of one who is fully master of the situation and of himself. "Did you come across any traces of my young cousin—the one who disappeared?"

Marshall regarded him steadily. "I was engaged, as was Mr. Whauple, by your cousin's mother," he answered.

"Well," Pierre said, after a pause—not quite so much master of the situation, now—"probably you know your own business, though any communication you have for her will be passed on to me, as an interested party. I'm sorry you take this attitude."

"Merely a matter of loyalty to our employer," Marshall assured him, smiling pleasantly. "Can we offer you anything—a drink for instance?"

Pierre shook his head. "Thanks—no. You will be leaving for England soon, I suppose?"

"By the next boat, we hope," Marshall answered.

Pierre did not quite succeed in concealing his relief. "Ah!" he commented. "Well, I suppose we shall meet up at the club before you go—ask for me any time you like. Good-day to you."

Marshall looked after him as he went away. "A false move, Pierre," he remarked, thoughtfully.

"Damn silly," Whauple agreed. "And yet—he'll judge now that we found Clement."

Marshall smiled. "If we'd found Clement alive, we should have brought him back with us. If we'd found him dead, he couldn't tell us anything. Pierre has gone off even more puzzled than when he came."

Mrs. Martinez came out to see them.

"Inspector Simpson is here to see you Mr. Whauple," she chanted.

"Show him round, Mrs. Martinez," Whauple ordered. He turned to Marshall and held out his hand.

"Shake, good and hard," he said. "If that inspector had poked his nose round the corner ten minutes earlier, ours would have been out of joint."

* * *

Three evenings later, four men sat in Mrs. Martinez' sitting-room, which she had handed over to their use for the evening at the request of Inspector Simpson. The inspector, a clean-looking young official, tapped the table with his fingers from time to time, and seemed a trifle nervous; he had introduced Mr. Ling, the very English-looking Chinese interpreter, to Marshall and Whauple, and had declined an offered whisky peg. After that, silence, until it grew too oppressive for the inspector's nerves.

"On second thoughts, I think I will have a small peg, Mr. Marshall," he remarked, and seemed relieved at the diversion occasioned by mixing it, small though that was. He nodded at his hosts, took a small sip, and put the glass down again.

"It's a mad story, Mr. Marshall," he said. "If these Chinks let us down, I can say good-by to the force here. Pierre Delarey is a power in Sapelung, and they'll go straight to him."

"We are willing to compensate you—that was pointed out," Marshall reminded him. "But I don't think you need fear the Chinamen won't give conclusive evidence."

The inspector shook his head gravely. "You couldn't compensate a spoilt career," he said, "and in any case it's not to be thought of. I don't mind telling you I'm gambling on your word and that document you've got; and if—" He paused to listen. "It's my men," he concluded.

Marshall called—"Come in," in answer to a tapping at the door of the room, and there entered a sergeant and two constables, escorting a stolid-looking Chinese. The party ranged before the table at which the four sat, and the sergeant saluted.

"Ping Yang, sir, arrested in accordance with your instructions."

Inspector Simpson looked at Whauple, "Was this your guide?" he asked.

Whauple shook his head slowly. "It may sound impossible, but my Chink was uglier than this one," he answered.

The inspector turned to his interpreter. "Now, Ling, get busy," he bade. "We arrest Ping Yang for being concerned in the murder of Clement Delarey at some time and place at present unknown, at the instigation of Pierre Delarey. Also, at the instigation of Pierre Delarey, for being concerned in the attempted murder of Erasmus Whauple, by the administering of ground glass and also by stabbing. Also, at the instigation of Pierre Delarey, being concerned in the murder of Jean Pernaud, at some place and time at present unknown. Point out to Ping Yang that if he is convicted and hanged his body will not go back to China, and point out that if

he can give proof of Wong Lee's guilt, he may get off. Get out of him how much Pierre Delarey paid them both, and don't forget to tell him that anything he says will be used in evidence against him. Here are all the points—on this paper. Now get busy."

"Me velly busy washee man—iron him clothes—please let me glo," Yang broke silence to ask.

Inspector Simpson gestured a negative. "We'll keep you, to see if it's necessary to hang you out to dry without washing you," he answered. "This gentleman will now question you in your own language."

Thereupon Mr. Ling got busy, as the inspector expressed it, with a note book in which he took down Yang's answers, given sometimes reluctantly, sometimes volubly and eagerly. It went on without interruption for over half an hour, and then Ling stopped questioning.

"You would like to hear the answers, sir?" he asked Simpson.

"Read on," Simpson bade. "Summarize the main facts."

Ling cleared his throat, and began. "The accused Ping Yang was hired by Pierre Delarey, in company with Wong Lee, to act as escort to Clement Delarey until they reached a salt pan eight days' full journey eastward from Sapelung, and there to desert him. Wong Lee was hired by Pierre Delarey to escort Jean Pernaud at least five days' journey eastward, and paid four hundred dollars for certainty that he would not return. Wong Lee was again hired by Pierre Delarey to escort Erasmus Whauple five days' journey to the eastward, and paid three hundred dollars to make certain he would not return—"

"The dirty swine—cutting my price down!" Whauple interrupted.

"The money was paid in coinage in both cases, and was in addition to and exclusive of ordinary wages for normal services."

"You understand that, Yang?" Simpson asked.

"Quite velly," Yang answered.

"Is it all true?"

"Quite velly. Me cookee washee guidee—no killee. Leavee one man one time. Wong Lee killee two man two time. Not me."

Simpson sat back with a sign of relief. "Thank God it's no mare's nest!" he exclaimed. "Now, Sergeant, march him out and put him in a cell after you have formally charged him—his formal statement, after the official charge, can be read back to him—this is not official. Send in Wong Lee as you go."

"No talkee Wong Lee—velly much liar, Wong Lee," Ping Yang protested, with the first sign of animation he had shown. But he was hustled out and Lee was marched in by another sergeant and two constables to take his place.

"The formula is exactly the same, Ling, with the name of Wong Lee substituted for that of Ping Yang," Simpson remarked. "You can get busy."

Again the long succession of questions and answers, while the three waited patiently—more patiently, now, especially Inspector Simpson, who felt already that he had got the case he had been promised. Again Ling gave a summary of the results which were identical with those he had obtained from Yang, with the names transposed. Yang was the villain, and Lee the innocent cookee washee guidee—this in spite of the fact that before Lee sat the man whom he had attempted to poison and stab.

He insisted, stolidly, that Ping Yang had been Whauple's guide, and that his complicity ended with the escorting of Clement Delarey to the salt pan and deserting him there. In the end he went, with instructions to the sergeant similar to those given in the case of Yang.

THE inspector leaned back in his chair and finished his whisky peg, which had gone very flat.

"Well, gentlemen, I'm extremely obliged to you. By tomorrow night I hope to have Mr. Pierre Delarey under lock and key as accessory before the fact, and I think I may say you have given me a case which will prove the biggest sensation Sapelung has known for years."

But his anticipations were not all realized. Late in the next afternoon he called on Marshall and Whauple, unexpectedly.

"A great disappointment to me," he announced. "Pierre Delarey has shot himself. Apparently he realized that the arrest of the Chinamen was bound to lead to disclosures which would establish his guilt, and chose not to be hanged. From his point of view, it was the best thing he could do."

Whauple shook his head sympathetically. Marshall went further. "I am very sorry to hear it," he said. "I wanted him to hang."

"But it's a family habit," Erasmus remarked thoughtfully. "As soon as one of

'em gets up a tree, apparently, he shoots himself to save expense. If Clement's father hadn't had the same breed of bat in his belfry we should never have gone looking for Mah—none of this would have happened."

"Well," Simpson reflected, after a pause, "I hope I'm never tempted by the chance of four million francs, or there's no telling what I might do in a place like this."

"As an investment, give me honesty every time," Erasmus commented. "Virtue may be its own reward, but I believe in it because it pays the best dividends in the long run."

"I'm sorry to tell you, Mr. Whauple, that you will not be able to leave by the next boat for Batavia," Simpson pursued. "Your evidence will be necessary for the trial of the two Chinamen."

"Sapelung can congratulate itself then," Erasmus remarked, cheerfully, "and I'll take a little holiday now." He went close up to Simpson and spoke in a confidential way—"I may get a little bit—you know, happy—odd times. Just give your men the wheeze to treat me gently—touch of the sun—you know."

The inspector condescended to something perilously near a wink. "Nelson," he answered.

"That's it—blind eye—when I'm blind," Erasmus agreed heartily. "I do appreciate a man and a brother."

The next day he went up to Government House and demanded to see Mr. Flatwell. Interviewed by various minor lights, he persisted that his business was of a personal nature, and must be transacted with Mr. Flatwell himself, and after nearly an hour he faced the sandy, important little personage in his own room.

"Mr.—er—Whauple, I think," Flatwell said coldly.

"That same," Erasmus answered with the utmost pleasantness.

"And what can I do for you, Mr. Whauple?"

"I came to ask you if you'd lunch with me tomorrow," Erasmus said, calmly.

Mr. Flatwell stared as if he could not have heard aright, but Whauple waited for an answer to the invitation.

"Thank you, but I must certainly decline," Flatwell said at last, and the words were like slabs of ice rubbed against each other. "I couldn't think of it."

"I was afraid not," Erasmus said, regretfully. He moved toward the dor. "It would have been worth a lunch to tell you that you're the most sozzle-brained, shoddiest, ugliest pup that ever kept a real man out of a job, but I shan't be able to tell you, now."

And, while Flatwell sat, too stupefied to answer, he went out slowly, as if grieved at the lost chance, to continue his holiday.

When, at last, he stood on the deck of the mail steamer and watched Sapelung recede, a thought occurred to him.

"You fixed up about Henry?" he asked.

Marshall smiled as he remembered the visit he had paid to the rubber man to retrieve Henry's belongings, and the difficulty he had had in getting away from the rubber man's hospitality.

"I found his aunt—his mother was dead, and he lived with his aunt, till he went out with me," he answered.

"They always do," Erasmus commented. "Their mothers are always dead, and they always live with their aunts—it's a conspiracy."

"She took over his property, and his salary, and promised to give his testament and the portrait to his young lady—"

"Whose name was either Martinez or de Souza," Whauple interrupted.

"It was Martinez," Marshall agreed.

"Poor old Henry!" Whauple reflected. "If it hadn't been for him and his little tortoise, we should still be trying to find a way out from the valley of silent men."

Marshall looked back at the land they had left without answering. The boat had nearly rounded the point on which the lighthouse stood, and, as they watched, the last of Sapelung disappeared behind the headland. The cut in the hills beyond still showed plainly, marking a stage on the way to Mah-Eng, to Tari-Hi and. . . .

"I wonder," Erasmus said thoughtfully, noting his companion's abstracted gaze toward the far-off hills.

But Marshall, lost in thought, did not hear at first. He turned suddenly, realizing that Erasmus had spoken—

"What was that?" he asked.

"I said"—Erasmus prevaricated, deliberately—"it was all through poor old Henry and his little tortoise."

CHAPTER IX

THE FINALE TO ADVENTURE

AGAIN Marshall noted the warmth of Madame Delarey's sitting-room as oppressive—it was mid-August, and there seemed to him no need for arti-

ficial heating, but she evidently thought otherwise. The ostentatious magnificence of the room, as before, added to its oppressiveness.

He waited, together with Whauple, until the little old lady entered, leaning more heavily on her ebony stick than when he had first seen her—was it only nine months before? She looked from him to Whauple and then back at him; then she sat down on the very edge of one of the plush-covered chairs.

Mr. Victor Marshall, and Mr. Erasmus Whauple, you do not speak, but I know. I see in the paper about Pierre, and I know. My dear son Clement do not come back with you—'e is dead."

It was assertion, with no hint of questioning. Marshall bowed a grave assent, and Whauple went to the little old lady and held out to her the two rings he had taken from Clement's fingers. "These were his—I thought you might like to have them, and they are proof," he told her.

"They are proof," she agreed, with but a brief glance at each of them as she took them from him. "Even if it was not in the paper, yet I know, for my dear son come to me and stand beside me, so I know. 'E was all I 'ad—all I 'ad."

"You might wish to know all we can tell you of his death," Marshall suggested.

"Did 'e give you any message for me?" There was resentment, hostility, in the way in which she asked the question.

"Only his dear love to you—no other message," Marshall lied.

"Then why should I pain me?" she asked, with angry querulousness. "If you 'ave a cut, Mr. Victor Marshall, do you wiggle the knife in the cut to make pain for yourself? Tell me my dear son Clement is not dead—tell me that!"

They were helplessly silent; there was an odd, futile menace in the hopeless command.

"No," she went on, "you cannot tell me that, ever. 'E was all I 'ad, and as you say when you write to me once, Mr. Erasmus Whauple, my dear son is gone to the valley of silent men. It was pretty words for death, and soon, very soon, I too will go to the valley of silent men, so I shall again be with 'im."

The phrase brought back to Marshall's mind the wonderful beauty of the valley—and then he recalled the growing lake he had last seen, thought of the bodies of the dead that the rising waters held.

"To you, Mr. Erasmus Whauple, my notary will pay other five 'undred pounds, if you go to 'im and ask 'im. To you, Mr. Victor Marshall, 'e will not pay you one penny, not till it cost you more than five 'undred pounds in notary's charges. If you want other money, you ask Stephanie that you marry, the ingrate girl that desert me after I feed 'er and clothe 'er and make 'er my companion. You 'ave one five 'undred pounds, you do not bring back my dear son, so you 'ave no more." She spoke with grim satisfaction, and hate in her eyes as she gazed at him.

"Madam," Marshall answered quietly, "I have not asked for it."

Madame Delarey pointed at the door. "You go—queek—I will not be insult by you! Go, or I tell them to throw you in the window, if you will not go through the door. Go, I tell you!"

The last words were almost a squeal, and Marshall obeyed the command without further words; he understood a little better how it was that Stephanie had been so anxious to escape; Madame Delarey was not a pleasant sight in her wrath. He went down the carpeted stairs, remembering how Stephanie had stopped him there at the beginning of this quest, and in the vestibule of the hotel he waited till Whauple came down to him.

"Seems to me the mortar-courses in her top storey want repointing," Whauple remarked when he came. "Harmless, of course, but—did you marry Stephanie?"

"I did," Marshall answered.

"Lord, why didn't I think of it?" Erasmus lamented. Suddenly he turned on Marshall. "Here, we landed last night, and it's past lunch time—ain't you going to look up and find where your wife is?"

"All in good time," Marshall answered. "Our first job, though, is to go to a solicitor I know. We shall probably have to make sworn depositions or something to get leave to presume the death of Clement, so that Stephanie can inherit as she ought."

"Gee-whiz!" Erasmus reflected. "If I had a husband like you I'd leave off trimming my nails and order in half a ton of size nine flat-irons. You're bright—bright and early."

"Maybe," Marshall answered imperturbably. "By the way, I got a rough estimate of the value of that gold. It's something over three thousand pounds apiece."

Erasmus started toward the door of the hotel. "Come on," he urged. "Don't let's even stop for one drink—let's get a cab straight to that lawyer you wanted to find."

"What's the hurry?" Marshall asked, following him out to where he began waving frantically for a taxi.

"Hurry?" he echoed, derisively. "Three thousand pounds—hurry? My poor old mother waiting down at Balham—August—Margate sands—and me not seen her yet? And you say hurry!"

Marshall gave the driver the address of his solicitor, and followed Whauple into the taxi. Whauple settled himself luxuriously, content now that they were on the move.

"If you was me, Marshall, what'd you invest in—a farm, or a pub?"

"I'd toss for it," Marshall suggested.

"You see, if I invest in farming, I shall think of the jolly little evenings in the back parlour, and if I get the pub I shall want to scratch the pigs' backs and have my own new-laid eggs for breakfast. It's a hell of a puzzle—they say money always brings responsibilities. I think I'll go down to Hurst Park and Kempton and blow the lot in—I could have a devil of a time among the bookies till I skinned."

"I should suggest a safe investment—you could get five or six per cent," Marshall advised. "That's a sure three pounds a week as backing to anything you earn, and you could look round for a bit on the five hundred waiting for you."

"Sound, but damn slow," Erasmus commented. "The earwig in the marmalade is that we've come back at the wrong time—the best of the flat season is over, and it's months till football starts. I'll think about what I'll do till that five hundred is all blown in."

* * *

Bob Crawford kissed her brother, criticaly rather than demonstratively. She and Victor understood each other, and emotionalism had never been a failing of theirs.

"You look older, Victor—a bit worried, I think," she remarked. "What was it—a hard time?"

He nodded. "Where's Stephanie?" he asked.

"Gone in to town for me—Oxford Street—shopping. We got your wire last night, and expected you would arrive this morning. Stephanie waited till I persuaded her it was no use waiting any longer—you would turn up when you thought you would. I think she's a bit nettled."

She went on with her work, cutting out something in a businesslike manner. The dining-table was littered with bits of dress material, as was the floor. Marshall sat down and looked at her, amusedly.

"What have you been doing, Bob?" he asked.

"Playing your hand for you," she answered promptly. "To begin with, I had to persuade Stephanie to stay in your rooms instead of looking for some of her own, where she wouldn't be under my eye—I did it on the score of expense, in case Clement came back and left her dependent on you. She told me the whole story. Then I had to educate her—I gave her a thorough course of lessons."

"On what subject?" he asked.

"Victor Marshall—she's worth six million francs," Bob answered, in spite of pins in her mouth, "and she's a very charming girl, Victor, worth ten of that moon-faced thing you thought you broke your heart over, even if she hadn't a penny. I made up my mind to keep her in the family, and you do your best to spoil it all by stopping away a day after land— There she is!"

Marshall remembered grave grey eyes, and a rather pale, serious Stephanie; he stood surprised at the change time and Bob had wrought in her, for she entered glowing, with a laugh in the grey eyes—and froze as she saw him standing in the room.

"I thought I'd just let you come in and find him, Stephanie," Bob said calmly. "He's been here hours." It was just twenty minutes since Marshall had entered.

With obvious effort Stephanie went over to Marshall and held out her hand. "I am glad to see you, safely back," she said, coolly. "We gathered—there were stories in the paper about Pierre and some Chinamen—a tragedy of the East, they called it. You did not find Clement—that is, you did not find him alive?"

"I found him alive and left him dead," Marshall answered. "It is a long story which I'll tell some other time, if you wish to hear it. The end of it is that I saw your step-mother today, and she threatened to have me thrown into the street for marrying you. I came here today to ask you—the whole of your uncle's fortune comes to you now Pierre is dead, as soon as technical details can be settled—to ask you to make the old lady some allowance to keep her in comfort. It will not be for long—one can see she's falling."

Stephanie seemed to be considering him more than the proposal. "Yes," she agreed. "Perhaps you will arrange it for me."

"Certainly," he promised. "And—one other matter—our marriage. The procedure is likely to be slow, I find—one of us must sue the other—I will put you in touch with a solicitor through my own man, and then you will have very little trouble over the annulment, I believe—all you'll need will be patience."

"Thank you," she said. "And the—your half-million francs?"

"This annulment will take some time to get moving—there is no hurry," he answered. "And in any case, you can't pay it till you have it—there are formalities connected with proving the death of Clement—"

"And—when will you want your rooms?" She was ice as she asked the question, and Bob looked from one to the other with obvious disappointment in spite of her having educated Stephanie.

Things were not turning out as she had wished.

"Probably not for another two or three months," Marshall answered. "I'm staying up in Soho, so as to be near things. Come and have lunch with me tomorrow at Gennaro's—we can go into affairs more thoroughly, then. You remember Gennaro's?"

"I am not likely to forget it," she answered. "But why not here? I feel that I am keeping you away."

"Don't," he said, "for there's no need to feel it. If I come here too much, or stay here while you are occupying my rooms, it may throw a doubt on your case. I don't know—" He was about to say that the fact of her occupying the rooms after his return complicated the case, but thought better of it. He could get Bob to tell her that.

Stephanie coloured angrily at the reminder. "I want you to tell me"—she spoke slowly—"why—I am a little older than when you went, and know a little more of the world, thanks to Bob—your sister. Will you tell me—when I asked you to take me away—why did you suggest marriage? You could have brought me here—"

"Because, when you asked as you did, I wanted to help you," he answered, coldly, "and marriage was the only form of contract that would bind you absolutely to payment. A girl went back on her word to me once, and I put it out of your power to repeat the experiment."

Stephanie's colour faded as quickly as it had risen—she went white with anger.

"You think that of me?" she asked.

"I knew no more of you than you knew of me," he answered, quite unmovedly. "The decision to make the contract binding in that way had nothing to do with you personally—there was nothing personal about it, when it was made. If I had known you, I should probably have taken your word."

"Probably?" she seized on the word and echoed it, ironically.

"Stephanie," he said, almost harshly, "splitting hairs is not a pastime of mine. I have played this game through for you, and will finish it for you, honestly and fairly. I shall be at Gennaro's tomorrow at one, waiting in case you care to come. Till then, good-by."

He stopped to kiss Bob as he passed her, and Stephanie, moving quickly, reached the door beside him and laid her hand on his arm. "I'm sorry," she said. "It is not—not an easy situation."

"My dear child, there's nothing to be sorry about," he assured her. "It will all come right if you give it time. Don't forget—Gennaro's at one o'clock."

He went out, without waiting for her answer. Stephanie went back to Bob and watched the cutting-out.

"Half-a-crown a yard, double width—if I'd bought a shirt like it ready-made, it would have been two guineas at least," Bob said. "What do you think of your husband, Stephanie?"

Stephanie went and sat down by the empty grate. She bent forward and looked into vacancy.

"As you told me, he is a man," she answered.

"I DON'T think I can make you realize the journey back," Marshall concluded his story. "You've never seen what dense jungle is like, so you can't realize it. It was months since Henry and I had passed going the other way—toward this place Mah-Eng instead of back from it—and there wasn't a sign of a track left. There were places where we had to cut every yard. I had a preparation that kept the mosquitoes off us—the smell of it would make a charging lion halt in mid-air—but I caught some sort of marsh-fever, or jungle fever, and Whauple proved himself a man. There's one day that I remember nothing about, only I know Erasmus Whauple saved my life. We had heavy packs, and he sweated under nearly double weight to spare me because I was ill—and at last we came out from the jungle and saw open country—the river

had guided us back till we could see the pass I started from with Henry. I think you know what happened with Pierre in Sapelung."

Stephanie nodded a silent assent. It was near on four o'clock, and from time to time a hovering waiter came and looked at the two who had sat down to lunch at a quarter past one, in case M'sieu should want anything. In spite of his long absences, they remembered M'sieu.

Stephanie, propping her chin in her hands, suddenly became aware that the posture exhibited her wedding ring, and sat back, folding her hands primly in her lap. That wedding ring had a way of obtruding itself at times, usually when she wished it would not.

She thought over the story Marshall had told. It had begun with Obadiah S. Fetherboom in Colombo, passed on to Mackeller—good man, Mackeller—and the engaging of Henry. It had told of the journey from Sapelung to Mah-Eng, of the crab-slide and the crabs, of Wauple's ridiculous signs and of the people of the silent valley, slaves forever of the tree of sleep. Of Clement in the valley, of the hope against hope for a way out to the world beyond the spell of the unearthly trees, of Henry's tortoise and how by means of it the way out was made, the valley destroyed. Of Tari-Hi, courteous gentleman that he was, of Milu the administrator of laws, of the flooded gold mine and the gold stored from the days when Baal Caesar's galleys had ceased from their sailing. But of Aia's existence the story held no word, nor was there any mention of Clement's last crime, the shooting of Milu and Milu's children, for Marshall and Whauple had agreed between themselves that neither Aia nor the shooting should be mentioned in any story either of them might tell.

"It is impossible—quite impossible," Stephanie said at last. "The most wonderful story—"

"Quite impossible," Marshall agreed. "The whole world is full of impossible things."

"One thing more I want to know—you won't tell me, though," she said. "I should like to know what Mr. Victor Marshall was doing in these impossible happenings. All through the story I've heard barely a word of him—and yet he was there, surely?"

Marshall looked a trifle disconcerted. "There was nothing for him to do," he answered, rather lamely. "He was just plugging along, and hanging on to hope by his eyelids."

There was a significance in that last phrase which, lacking the mention of Aia, she could not realize. In order to hold on to hope, he had had to shut his eyes to Aia.

"The only mention of him I get is when the man—Whauple—lost courage, and Mr. Victor Marshall tried to cheer him up—get Henry to play a little joke," she said.

"No," he urged, earnestly, remembering the reality of that time. "You've got it all wrong. I was just as depressed as Whauple was, really—he bucked up after a few hours, and we made up our minds to play the game through together till something happened—as it did."

Stephanie smiled. She had got back her animation, and was a different being from the cold, ironic, hostile girl who had faced him the evening before.

"I should like to meet this Erasmus Whauple and hear his version," she said.

Marshall stole a surreptitious glance at his wrist watch. "Well, that's the yarn, as you asked for it," he remarked, "and it has taken a long time to tell. It's quite incredible, I know. Now—don't you think we'd better come down to the discussion of more mundane affairs?"

She consulted her watch quite openly. "No," she answered. "You have given me quite enough to think about, for one day. Supposing you take me somewhere—somewhere nice, with a band that doesn't make too much noise—for tea?"

They went down to Rumpelmayer's—Stephanie had never tried it, and was fascinated by the name, band or no band. Later, Marshall saw her into a taxi, and gave the driver the address in Bearnais Road.

"I think I like this afternoon much better than the last we had together," she observed. "If only you were coming up with me—Bob would love to hear that wonderful story of the valley."

"I will, some day," Marshall promised. "This is not our last meeting, I hope."

When the taxi had gone off, he walked up to Piccadilly and along westward till he came to Hyde Park; there he chose a seat, and meditated for a long time. It was a brilliant evening in mid-August—brilliant for London.

There were some things, like the perfectly clear air over the plateau beside the valley of silent men, and the wonderful opalescent haze which had lain like a coverlet over the fields of sleep, that he would never see again, of course. For there are certain phases and emotions in life

which, once lost, can never be recaptured. Yet, though one may be up to a point a slave of environment, these things do not die altogether; they pass to the inner shine of memory—a wise old man had told him that there is a secret place of thought that none may share. In spite of the old man's counsel, in spite of the unshared shrine of thought, Marshall felt the wisdom of that saying which declares that it is not good for man to be alone.

* * *

Late September. In the secluded corner of Gennaro's where they had first faced each other across a lunch table, Marshall and Stephanie sat. A small suitcase was beside her chair, and she looked browned by a week-end she had spent at the seaside with Bob, who had turned her over to Marshall for the evening while she herself went home. Most of the diners at the restaurant had paid their bills and gone, and two theatre tickets, wasted, lay beside Marshall on the table.

"What a funny man Mr. Whauple is," Stephanie remarked, to fill in a silence that Marshall had let grow inordinately.

"Whauple's sound," he answered, "and in any case, I know somebody just as funny. I took the trouble to get these tickets—"

"But don't you see what a compliment it is?" she asked. "Being with you interests me so much—"

Marshall looked at her steadily while her colour deepened.

"I saw—I saw my step-mother this morning," she said, with a sort of hurried desperation. "I told her—it was your suggestion, when you first came back, you remember—I told her that she need never worry, and I would allow her all she wanted. And she cried, and spoke of her dear son—she's just a shadow, and won't last long. Oh, and I forgot—"

She took up her handbag and fumbled in it for a long time—it gave her an excuse for looking anywhere but at the man before her—and at last produced an envelope which she pushed across the table. Marshall opened it, scrutinized the slip of paper which he took from it, very carefully, and then looked up at her questioningly.

"I asked at the bank this afternoon—I couldn't work it out myself," she explained, still in that nervous, hurried way. "They told me that was right—half-a-million francs at the current rate of exchange."

Smiling, Marshall folded the cheque carefully, and put it in his vest pocket. "Anything else?" he asked.

Stephanie looked at him anxiously. "Have I done wrong?" she asked. "Bob said—oh, do tell me if I've done wrong! I didn't know, Victor—"

She stopped confusedly, and looked down rather than meet his eyes. The name had slipped out before she thought—Bob always called him that in speaking of him, and she had got into the habit of using it too, but never before had she used it to his face.

"Stephanie, dear," Marshall said gravely, "you remember a November evening last year when I took you home to Bob?"

"I remember," she agreed, nervously.

"When I left, I said to you, 'Supposing—' and you answered that it would be just payment."

"But—the cheque—I have paid," she answered. "You don't mean—you are not angry?"

"Not a bit. But—supposing—"

She neither answered nor looked at him, only lifted her left hand with a restless, nervous gesture—and her wedding ring shone in the light.

"And—the first time we lunched here," Marshall went on slowly. "You cried, because it wasn't real—you'd been cheated of the real—"

Two tears rolled down her cheeks at the memory and the way in which he recalled it. He stood up and reached for her suitcase.

"I'm going to get you a taxi, Stephanie—it's very late."

He came back to her, after, and, having waited while she collected her belongings, took her out to the street, where the commissionaire held the door of the taxi open. Marshall followed her into the cab and seated himself beside her, contrary to their usual custom.

"But he's not going right," she said, after a couple of unfamiliar corners had been turned. "This is quite wrong for Golders Green."

"Possibly," Marshall answered, "and yet it may be right for us. Stephanie dear, supposing—"

She leaned forward and stared into his eyes. Then, as he took her hands and drew her close to him, she understood fully.

"Stephanie—wife?" Marshall asked. "It's not too late to turn back—to take you back to Bob. Shall I stop him?"

She clung to him and hid her face. "If—if you wish—Victor. Not unless—"

MASTERS OF FANTASY

Clark Ashton Smith—THE STAR-TREADER—Born 1893

It is fitting and proper that this man of double shadows should be the 13th in this series. H. P. Lovecraft rechristened him Klar-Kashton, and said of him: "None strikes the note of cosmic horror so well." A Dunsany with the vocabulary of a Shiel. Smith weaves phantasmal webs of word imagery which spellbind the willing victim and lead him in bonds of thralldom to vanished worlds and vanquished worlds, to worlds to be and worlds—better not to be: supplicate the Elder Gods that their diabolic denizens may never scrabble and slither into our dimension! Does he create with xanthic chalk on ebon slate, recording forbidden glimpses of interstitial nightmare and extra-temporal rites? It is to be believed. A close acquaintance with George Sterling, Smith too has penned memorable imaginative poetry, 4 volumes of which have been collected. And those who have made the pilgrimage to his umbrageous abode in Auburn—and returned alive (and in full possession of their faculties)—report that he is the master not only of the written fantasy medium, but of the outré in sculpture and the sklifesque in sketch. There can be little doubt that this strange recluse is a sorcerer from another sphere!

THE COUNTER CHARM

By Margaret St. Clair

"LOUSY monsters," Sanderson said critically. He leafed once more through the latest issue of *Glowing Skull Magazine.* "The backgrounds are no good, either. I don't say it just because they're our competitors, but this new artist of theirs stinks."

Mopsa Hansen, his assistant, stretched out her plump hand for the magazine. She studied it, twisting absently at her wedding ring. "Oh, I don't know," she said after a minute. "He can't draw, of course, and his composition is no good, but you've got to admit he has a sort of talent for weird atmosphere. Those trees like mushrooms, and the way the grass or whatever it is looks half-alive. I bet most of the fantasy fans go for him. And the teeth on his monsters really frighten me."

Sanderson sneered. His Adam's apple bobbed up and down. "He not only can't draw, has no sense of composition, and adopts a fiendishly repulsive tonality," he said with relish, "he has a general lack of taste that would sicken a billy goat. He's not just inept, he's bad on purpose. Poisonously, viciously bad. I don't know when I've seen work I dislike so much. If he ever has the crust to submit a picture to *Unearthly Tales*, I'll send it back to him so fast his art gum eraser will hurt."

"Poor old Sandy," Mopsa said indulgently, "you're too aesthetic for your own good." She opened a tin of butterscotch and popped three or four of the candies into her mouth. "You can't seem to realize," she said in muffled tones, "that being art editor of a weird fiction magazine isn't Art. Sit on your ideals, boy. You're only here to please the customers."

Sanderson made no reply. After a moment he picked up the copy of *Glowing Skull Magazine* and flipped through it once more. And once more he sneered.

Some two weeks later George Blades, Editor-in-Chief of Publex Publications, called Sanderson into his office.

"Sanderson, old chap," he said after the requisite preliminary remarks had been made, "I want you to meet Jabez Ordway. Mr. Ordway, this is Angus Sanderson, our art editor."

Sanderson shook hands with Ordway gingerly. He disliked the man on sight. Ordway had light, piggish eyes, a flabby handclasp, and a form which reminded Sanderson of mashed potatoes which have been made into rosettes by being forced through a pastry tube. As a final touch the man was wearing dark green knee breeches. Where did Blades pick up these people, anyhow?

"Ordway is the new chap who's been doing those splendid drawings for *Glowing Skull,*" Blades went on. "No doubt you've noticed them." Sanderson stared.

"You'll be pleased to know, Sanderson, that as of today Ordway is doing all the art work for *Unearthly Tales.* It's an experiment which I am sure will be a satisfactory one. You and he will work very closely together."

Sanderson's jaw dropped. He turned red and made noises like strangling. His

The bug-eyed monster in the life of* Unearthly Tales' *editor was a real-life nuisance — at first. That was bad enough. But when it chased him right into the pages of his own magazine—that was very bad!

"What do you know about monsters?" Ordway had asked insolently. "Have you ever seen one?"

Adam's apple was throbbing incoherently.

Ordway gave a faint, pursy smile. He got a box from the pocket of his Norfolk jacket, opened it, and put something from it with his thumb in either side of his nose. After a moment he sneezed.

Sanderson found his voice. "Listen, George, could I speak privately to you for a minute?"

"If it's necessary, yes." George Blades did not look pleased.

"What's the big idea?" Sanderson demanded hotly when they were alone. "Who ever heard of one artist doing all the art work for a book?"

"It's an experiment, I told you."

"But he's lousy! I know his work, and it's terrible. He can't draw anything right except monsters' teeth."

Blades shrugged. "Frankly, Angus, I'm acting on orders from above. You know how Publex is and who owns it. I got a note from her today, couched in what you might call vigorous terms, telling me what to do with Ordway. She's a pretty shrewd business woman, so I don't suppose it'll hurt the circulation. The note said he was a cousin of hers, but my private opinion is that he's got something on her."

"But—am I Art Editor of *Unearthly Tales*, or not?"

"Today you're the art editor. Tomorrow—who can say?"

Sanderson winced. He knew he could

get another job, probably a good one, but it might take time. Last week he had made a down payment on a choice wooded cabin site in Marina, and he had been planning to see an architect soon. If he resigned, he didn't know how long he'd have to wait.

"O.K.?" Blades asked, watching him.

"O.K."

ORDWAY proved unexpectedly easy to work with. Sanderson, who had decided to handle him with kid gloves, made his suggestions with laborious tact; Ordway listened, smiling faintly and taking snuff from time to time. The drawings, when he submitted them, were perhaps a shade less disgusting than those he had done for *Glowing Skull Magazine*, and in the matter of monsters, which were Sanderson's particular aversion, Ordway had been remarkably restrained. There were only two in the entire batch.

Sanderson was not as pleased by Ordway's tractability as he might have been. He disliked the man more for each time he set eyes on him. And the thought of the pages of *Unearthly Tales—his Unearthly Tales*—being defaced by Ordway's abominable drawings made him miserable. His stomach began bothering him. He got a bottle of anti-acid pills from the drug store, but they didn't help much. His depression increased as press time drew near. By the time the first copies of the December issue were coming off, his mood was so noticeable that Mopsa commented on it.

"What's the matter, Sandy? Ulcers getting started again? Or are knee breeches' drawings getting you down?"

"Mainly the drawings. Need you ask?"

Mopsa's smile vanished slowly. "He *is* nasty," she said as if to herself. "As nasty as his disgusting drawing are. A nasty, nasty little man." She gave her girdle a downward jerk.

"Has he been bothering you?" Sanderson asked suspiciously. He liked Mopsa, and had always had a brotherly attitude toward her.

"No—unh—" Mopsa hesitated. "I suppose I might as well tell you," she said. "He did make what you might call overtures. I pushed him away, and he said, 'My dear, you had better be careful. Have you ever hear of what Cagliostro did to women who displeased him? And his powers were nothing compared to mine. Now and then a fancy for plumpness takes me. I should advise you to be nice to me.'"

"Why, the nasty little squirt! I'll—"

"Take it easy, Sandy. I fixed him. I made the Horns at him, and told him if he bothered me again I'd sick grandmother on him." Mopsa's maternal grandmother was an Italian whose herbs, charms, and poultices were the wonder of her neighborhood. From what Mopsa had told him about the old lady, Sanderson had gathered that she was a white witch. "So now he gives me a wide berth. But he still bothers the other girls."

"Bothers them, does he?" Sanderson's face wore an expression of dour triumph. "Why, Mopsa, we've got him on toast. Even Mrs. Conner would fire him for that." Mrs. Conner was Publex Publishing Company's owner.

Mopsa shook her blond curls. "The girls are lots too scared to complain," she said. "He's got them all sold on the idea that he has some horrid occult power. They just try to keep out of his way."

"I'll beat up on him."

Again Mopsa shook her head. "Don't," she advised. "Most of us are married, and anyway, what I've been telling you would sound awfully, awfully queer in police court."

There was a defeated silence. Mopsa helped herself to a gum drop. Sanderson spoke at last. "Let's hope the readers don't like his work. If enough of them complain, Conner might transfer him to the staff of *Range Dreams*."

"Maybe. *If* enough of them complain."

Time passed. Ordway began work on the drawings for the issue after next, the April one. And the usual letters from the readers began coming in.

Sanderson's heart sank when the fiction editor gave the tabulation to him. Almost every letter this month had mentioned the new art work. About one person out of five had disliked it vehemently. The other four expressed attitudes ranging from tepid liking to actual enthusiasm.

It wasn't good enough. Sanderson went over to the window, raised it, and stood looking out and thinking. It wasn't good enough. Madeleine Conner would never transfer Ordway on the weight of such conflicting evidence. Knee breeches, occult powers, snuff and all, he was here to stay.

Of course Sanderson could resign. But the architect had already started on the plans for his cabin, and anyway resigning wouldn't solve the problem for Mopsa and the other girls. Ordway would still be around to pester and threaten them.

It began to get dark. The sky looked as if it might rain. Quitting time came. The office force left in the elevator. Sanderson stayed at the window, frowning and considering.

He had just decided that he might as well see about getting some dinner before it was too late, when the door opened and Ordway came in. He was carrying a portfolio under one arm. The knee breeches he was wearing were dull yellow ones.

"Hello, Sanderson," he said. "I happened to be in this part of town, and took a chance you wouldn't have left. I want you to O.K. these."

He handed the portfolio to Sanderson. Mechanically, the latter accepted and opened it.

His first reaction was of outrage. These drawings were terrible, worse than the worst Ordway had done for *Glowing Skull*. The backgrounds insulted the nose, the tonality had that gritty lack of contrast Sanderson found so maddening, and there was a monster in every one..

"But—but—" he stammered, too astonished to remember tact, "you've put monsters in all of them!"

"So I have," Ordway replied. "I like monsters. Mrs. Conner and I had a most interesting talk last week." He took the sheaf of drawings back from Sanderson and walked over to the window.

"But—Ordway, these monsters aren't well done. Their teeth are good, of course." Sanderson swallowed. Even this limited compliment was painful to him. "But their wings are too big, way out of scale. And their bodies don't articulate."

"What do you know about monsters?" Ordway asked in his high, insolent voice. "Have you ever seen one?" He was looking out the open window.

"No."

"Well, then, be quiet," Ordway said without turning. "As I told you, I've been talking to Mrs. Conner. Besides that, Sanderson, you'd better understand that it's not wise to vex me. I know some things to do with drawings and cut-out paper scraps. Unpleasant things. Unpleasant for you."

Sanderson inhaled. He had always hated Ordway. Now he was so angry he was trembling. Even then it might have been all right; he had every intention of leaving the room. But Ordway, still arrogantly keeping his back turned, spoke. "Take these, Sanderson. See that they get to the photoengraver tomorrow the first thing. Here." He flapped the sheaf of drawings at him.

The drawing on top featured a particularly badly drawn monster, an outsized lizard with pipestem legs and bat wings. It was standing in a dark and gritty landscape of exceptional repellency. At the sight of it, Sanderson felt a whir in his brain like that of an automatic calculating machine. Before he was even aware that he had moved, he had taken Ordway below the waist, lifted him up, and pitched him out over the window sill. The office was on the sixteenth floor. If Sanderson had had super acute hearing he might have heard, several seconds later, a squelchy plop.

The art editor sank down in a chair. After two or three minutes it occurred to him that he was a murderer. Shakily he put on his hat and coat and went out in the hall toward the emergency stairway. For obvious reasons he did not care to use the elevator.

THE inquest went off beautifully. An elevator operator remembered bringing Ordway up. A key to the office door was found in the dead man's pocket. Mopsa, without any prompting, testified that she and Sanderson had gone down in the elevator together, about half past five. Sanderson, doggedly perjuring himself, testified the same. Several witnesses spoke of Ordway's peculiar mannerisms, nervousness, eccentricity. The verdict of the coroner's jury included the words, "while of unsound mind."

For a week or so Sanderson felt an enormous relief. He burned the drawings Ordway had left, got in touch with his favorite artists, and began happily planning the three full-page spreads for the next issue of *Unearthly Tales*. His nervous indigestion stopped. Then he began to have the dreams.

At first they were not so bad. Ordway's figure was unsubstantial and tenuous, and it appeared only once in every two or three nights. But as time went on he took to appearing more and more frequently, always wearing his abominable yellow knee breeches, until Sanderson's dreams were full of him. Sanderson began to drink coffee late at night, to avoid his bed.

He thought of going to a psychiatrist. It must be his sense of guilt over the murder which was causing the dreams. (If it could be considered murder to kill a dirty, snuff-taking, breeches-wearing blackmailer like Ordway.) But would a psychiatrist's professional ethics prevent his turning a patient who admitted he was a murderer

over to the police? Sanderson felt it was too big a chance to take. He'd have to figure this one out by himself.

The dreams went on. The dark circles under Sanderson's eyes turned into pouchy brownish bags. Mopsa watched him with growing solicitude. Late one Thursday afternoon, despite his resistance, she got him in a corner and questioned him until she found out all about the dreams.

"We'll go see grandmother," she said briskly when he had finished. "She's just wonderful at things like that."

"You don't think a psychiatrist—" Sanderson began hopefully.

"No, I don't. These dreams aren't caused by guilt for anything you've, uh, done, Sandy. They're something else. Ordway was a nasty man, and it's my belief he had some rather nasty powers."

Mopsa's grandmother lived at the end of the street car line in a suburb where all the houses were alike. The old lady herself, though she had a heavy moustache and a figure from which too much *pasta* had eliminated the waistline, had retained such attractions of youth as a velvety olive skin and fine dark eyes. Sanderson took to her and trusted her at once.

"You no shoulda keel him," she said when the art editor had finished his halting tale. "Falla like that more dangerous dead."

Sanderson jumped. He looked reproachfully at Mopsa. She shook her blond head. "Grandmother always knows things," she said.

"Yes, yes," Mrs. Straglini replied emphatically. She spoke to Mopsa in Italian for a moment. "Is not so bad." she said, addressing Sanderson again. "Lotsa things worse than dreams."

The art editor quivered. "You mean you can't do anything to stop my dreams?" he asked.

Mrs. Straglini shrugged. "Coulda do things," she answered. "Notta good idea. Dreams no can hurt you. You getta use' to them."

There was a silence. Sanderson studied his fingernails. He was thinking of Ordway as he had seen him last night—pale faced, heavy jowled, obscenely ladling *snuff into his nose with the flat of his* thumb. And the look of malicious, hateful triumph in his little, piggish eyes—no, it wasn't possible. Sanderson couldn't get used to it.

"I—" he said. He halted to control his voice. "I haven't had any real sleep for three weeks. I've got to sleep some time. But I feel that I—that I'd rather die than go to sleep and see him standing there."

Mrs. Straglini looked at him keenly. After a moment, she nodded. "Ho Kay," she said. "Isa your funeral." She got up and walked out in the kitchen. In a few moments a very odd smell—burned, feathery, dusty and cloyingly sweet—began to float upon the air.

"What's she doing?" Sanderson asked Mopsa. A belated caution was stirring in him.

"Making a counter charm."

"Is that dangerous?"

"Not usually." Mopsa twisted the wedding ring on her plump left hand. "But you see, Sandy, Ordway got in on the ground floor. Grandmother's trying to make a barrier against him, and it'll be all right unless he's able to sort of short circuit it. In that case, he'd have all the power that was in the counter charm to draw upon. Magic is a little like judo—you use your opponent's power to disable him."

"Um. I see."

"But don't use the charm unless you have to, Sandy."

"I won't."

Mopsa's grandmother came back from the kitchen. She carried a very small bottle in one hand and a red flannel bag in the other. She put the bottle in the bag, tied it up, and handed it to Sanderson. He examined it wonderingly.

"Poot ina pocket of da night shirt," Mrs. Straglini explained. "No more dream."

Sanderson got out his billfold. She repulsed him with a magnificent gesture. "For frandship I do," she said. "Isa no charge."

"Will it really work?" Sanderson asked Mopsa when they were standing on the corner waiting for the street car. Freed of Mrs. Straglini's rather overwhelming presence, the likelihood of the charm's having any effect whatever had begun to seem remote to him.

"Oh, sure. If grandmother says no more dreams, no more dreams. But like I told you, it's dangerous. You never can tell with things like that. Don't use it unless you're really right at the end of your rope, Sandy."

Sanderson went to bed that night at about eight. He was too tired to eat, too tired even to mix himself a drink. He took a big dose of bicarbonate of soda and then put the red flannel bag carefully on the night stand beside his bed. He fell asleep almost at once.

He woke about twenty minutes later, covered with sweat. Ordway had been standing by the head of his bed grinning at him. Unhesitatingly Sanderson picked up the charm and put it in the breast pocket of his pajamas. He turned out the light.

This time, he slept wonderfully well. He awoke feeling fully rested and refreshed, with the consciousness that many hours had passed.

IT WAS still dark, with only a faint light in the sky. Sanderson yawned and stretched and began to get out of bed. It was then that he realized that something was wrong.

He was not in his bed, he was not even in his bedroom. Though it was still too dark to make out details, he seemed to be standing on a sort of springy turf. Over his head was a lusterless and somehow gritty sky.

Divided between panic and disbelief, Sanderson looked about him. He was indubitably awake, and equally indubitably not where he usually woke up. Where was he, then?

With a haunting sense of familiarity he studied the sky, the turf, the bloated, spongy trees. That gritty, sooty texture, that deliberately tasteless arrangement of objects and planes—where had he seen them before?

In—in—

No. Wait. It wasn't possible. He had seen them before in . . . in that last picture of Ordway's. The picture Ordway had been waving at him just before he . . . died. Somehow, Sanderson had got inside the picture.

Mopsa's grandmother's charm had backfired.

It *must* be a dream. Sanderson was still trying to convince himself of this when there came a sinister rustling in the brush behind him. Without a moment's hesitation, dream or no dream, Sanderson took to his heels. He stopped running only when he came up against a sort of glassy, invisible barrier which, he realized almost immediately, must be the picture's edge. He knew only too well what was chasing him.

It was the miserable sharp-toothed monster Ordway had drawn.

He had just begun to get his breath back when the rustle came again. Once more Sanderson ran. His heart was knocking against his ribs. Running, in the disgusting world that Ordway had limned, was an oddly exhausting feat. The clumps of spongy vegetation sucked at Sanderson's heels, and his body felt heavy and drawn-out. Ordway must have endowed his odious picture with greater than normal gravity.

How long would Sanderson be able to keep running? How much longer could he keep it up?

If day would only come! If he could see better he might be able to think what to do, how to get out of here. But as the rustle in the brush came time after time and the invisible monster continued its tireless pursuit of him, minutes lengthened into what must have been hours without any lightening of the sky. Sanderson realized with a dreadful sinking feeling that dawn would never come. The picture would stay as Ordway had created it, sunk in its leaden gritty gloom, forever and ever. World without end.

He was tiring now. The slithering noise in the bushes no longer roused him to instant activity. Pretty soon the monster—Sanderson tried to swallow with his dry throat—pretty soon the monster, the most hateful object in the hateful world Ordway had created, would overtake him at its leisure. Badly drawn as it was, it had a set of cruelly competent long white teeth.

There might be some way of getting out of the picture. But he was too thirsty, frightened and tired to even think of it.

He came at last to a brook, a sluggish sheet of ambiguous liquid Ordway had created with many scratches of the pen. No longer greatly caring whether the monster was gaining on him or not, Sanderson stooped to drink. He halted, terrified—more terrified than he had yet been. From the dim surface of the water a huge horned head was staring up at him.

Sanderson wheeled about with a hoarse cry. At first he did not understand. Trailing behind him in the sooty light were a long, scaly lizardlike tail, two wobbling pipestem legs. And on the back were folded ribbed, repulsive, rusty bat wings. His wings.

Sanderson began to run. He ran with the last of his strength, desperately, his tail trailing behind him, through the pulpy, bulbous hell Ordway had created for him. He stopped at last, shuddering with exhaustion. It was no use. He could not run away from himself. *He* was the monster in the picture. And he was in the picture to stay.

The Three

Three starlings perch in the maple tree.
(O whistle your call)
The wind of March blows high and free
But there are chains in the heart of me.
(Whistle your querulous call)

Three starlings cling and the high notes pierce.
(O piercing your call)
The wind goes loud but never so fierce
As three black words that shivered my ears,
(Black as your piercing call)

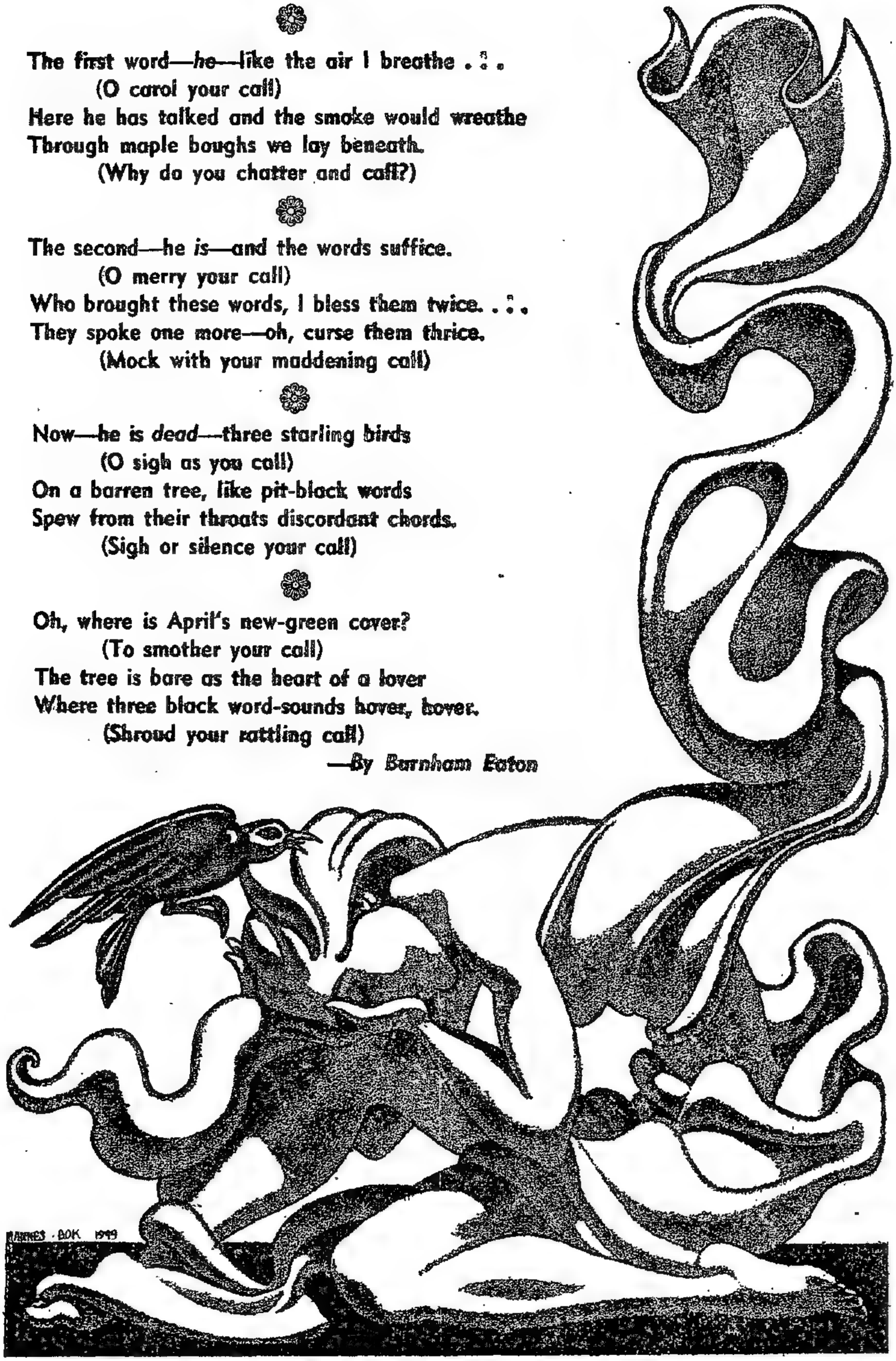
The first word—*he*—like the air I breathe . . .
(O carol your call)
Here he has talked and the smoke would wreathe
Through maple boughs we lay beneath.
(Why do you chatter and call?)

The second—he *is*—and the words suffice.
(O merry your call)
Who brought these words, I bless them twice. . . .
They spoke one more—oh, curse them thrice.
(Mock with your maddening call)

Now—he is *dead*—three starling birds
(O sigh as you call)
On a barren tree, like pit-black words
Spew from their throats discordant chords.
(Sigh or silence your call)

Oh, where is April's new-green cover?
(To smother your call)
The tree is bare as the heart of a lover
Where three black word-sounds hover, hover.
(Shroud your rattling call)

—By *Burnham Eaton*



The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, New York.

A Note From the Editor

Dear Readers:

You will have something different indeed in the story which is coming up in the October issue of this magazine. "The Starkenden Quest" by Gilbert Collins, is, I think, unique among the great fantasies which are available to us. It uses "gadgets" such as, as far as I know, very few fantasy writers have dared to dream up. The story begins with a strange safari through a prairie-like country of the mysterious East, and winds up with plenty of excitement in the caves to which the girl for whom our little party is searching has been spirited. It is there that the influence of unknown forces which had been threatening all along the way, begin to concentrate, and what happens in those caves is out of this world indeed. There is a slight resemblance to "The Purple Sapphire" here, but still it is widely different in treatment and denouement. I am sure you will like it.

A few days ago I was very interested to hear from one of our readers who had actually met M. P. Shiel, and I wrote back, special delivery, to ask Mr. Malcolm M. Ferguson of New Hampshire to tell us more about it. Here is his reply—

Dear Mary Gnaedinger:

I hardly knew what was in store for me when, three weeks after my arrival in England with the army, I received a V-Mail letter from August Derleth—"Now you are there, you may like some addresses: M. P. Shiel of "The Purple Cloud" fame lives at L'Abri, Worthing Road, Horsham, Sussex . . ." The name piqued my curiosity, for I had entirely forgotten it from the Lovecraft "Supernatural Horror in Literature." Soon I had the good luck of acquiring one of the few first editions of "The Purple Cloud" I have seen.

The evening that, lying on a cot in an army tent, I reached the climax of this exciting book by the sun's afterglow, a German air raid touched off a fuel depot eight miles away, and thus graphically against the sky did reality reflect fantasy, as it seems to have done often with regard to Shiel's writing. The ability to reach forward and seize by the forelock the spirit of the time to come—to project in fancy the future's figure—is a skill I believe Shiel shares with Goethe as exemplified in "Faust."

Naturally, after reading this, I gathered together, not without effort, a number of these rare books, sending them hurrying home lest they come to harm or add too much to my duffel bag.

And then one Sunday in November, 1944, on furlough in London, I set out from Waterloo Station for Horsham, and from Horsham five miles out along the Worthing Road, to New Road. I had had to ask directions repeatedly, for New Road was hardly more than a private lane, paralleling a venerable hedgerow. L'Abri took some finding too, for as I peered through the drizzle of rain at the lane's turn where I had a moment before been told to look, all I could see was a garden that might have been deserted in Swinburne's time, and a background of evergreens. But looking straight up the path I saw the door of L'Abri—the shelter.

A few moments after my knock, the door opened and I found myself face to face with M. P. Shiel. He was an elderly man, about five feet five, his full head of white hair forming a dandelion clock. He had good strong features and healthy coloration. His cheekbones were rather high, contributing to the fulness of his face.

He was dressed for comfort in a worn velvet smoking jacket, trousers free of crease, and house slippers which disguised his gait into a shuffle. He led me through a dark hallway to his sitting room, where a handful of coal embers, two guttering candles, and a window at the rear blocked by sodden shrubbery feebly contributed to the room's light. As my trip was a visit, not an interview, I did not feel constrained to cover any fixed topics, nor licensed to inquire into personal matters, and indeed it was better to know the man than about him.

He was living alone, but I could see none of the misanthropy that older recluses have. He talked easily and lucidly, none of his faculties being at all impaired, apparently. Surely his eyesight must have been extraordinarily keen to permit him to write in his small clear hand heedless of the murkiness of the shrouded room. He was at home, he told me, in eight languages, being occupied at the time of my visit with his Greek, reading New Testament sources for his study, "Jesus." Short conversational flights revealed his interests in the writings of Charles Fort, the philosophy of Bertrand Russell, the various factors that combine to give England her advantageous climate, and the many flights of German bombing planes which he had watched fly by heading for London. No, with as full a life as M. P. Shiel had led, his last decade in a snug harbor could hardly make a recluse of him.

When at last I left him to return to London through the swirl of fog and cold rain, it was with an increased regard for him as an able, indeed a brilliantly gifted, writer.

M. P. Shiel was nearly 82 when he died on the 17th of February, 1947, in Chichester, England. John Gawsworth, an occasional collaborator of Shiel's and his executor (though very much younger—now 36—reflecting Shiel's mental buoyancy) is writing the official biography. Meanwhile an American admirer, A. Reynolds

Morse of Cleveland, has compiled a surprisingly interesting bibliography ("The Works of M. P. Shiel, F.P.C.I." $6.) which includes not only the collations expected, but an outline of each book plus critical, biographical and pictorial material. And August Derleth, whose anthology "Sleep No More" contained Shiel's topnotch short story, "The House of Sounds" (the first copy that I saw was at L'Abri) plans to publish two volumes of short stores, "Prince Zaleski and Cummings King Monk" and "Xelucha and Others" by Shiel.

Something of the interest of Shiel's life is caught in the story of the Realm of Redonda. Shiel's father, an Irish shipowner in the British West Indies, relieved to have a son after eight daughters, made him "king" of a small unclaimed island, Redonda. This title had only a fanciful significance, yet it was kept alive by Shiel, and later by Gawsworth, as King Juan I of Redonda, who agreeably surprised some of Shiel's friends with a muniment making them Dukes of the Realm, and Arthur Machen Arch Duke.

As a young man, Shiel was handsome, dashing, happy-go-lucky, with dark, curly hair. He was twice married. His first wife died and he was separated from his second wife in 1929. Hence a decade later, with his married life behind him, he chose to will L'Abri to an American correspondent, Mrs. Annamarie V. Miller and her son Patrick, whom he had never met. Such a *beau geste*, I am sure, was quite typical of this great writer.

MALCOLM M. FERGUSON.
The Brookfield Bookshop,
Sanbornville,
New Hampshire.

An Exciting Novel

In "Dian of Lost Land" Marshall wrote an exciting and intelligent novel. The majority of the novels in which science (?) is dragged in to explain the phenomena of the story, such as "City of the Dead" and "Nordenholt's Million," are ponderous without being edifying. Marshall evidently possesses a considerable modicum of scientific knowledge and presents it in a manner which gives it an air of originality. The outer framework of his story is conventional: the survivor of an expedition who divulges his secret of an unknown locale and civilization to some individual who manifests cupidity and/or scientific zeal; the preparation for a return to the lost place; and the falling in love of one of the second party with a member of the primitive society, usually a girl inordinately beautiful, high-placed, and powerful, preferably a priestess or goddess.

All of these motifs are present in Marshall's tale; but he has in the process of concocting a stale plot injected some consistent scientific offshoots which convince within the limits of the narrative. Some of the theories coincide with certain widely accepted psychologic theories: I refer first to the explanation of the two head movements signifying agreement and disapproval, which, as Belgrade remarks, could have possibly developed from prehistoric eating habits.

This does not mean that the idea began with Marshall; he simply accrued the information from his reading; it is however interesting to see it presented in fiction. The reasoning processes of Belgrade while he and Weismann walk, goggles over their eyes and torches in their hands, toward the Neanderthals, is cogent and well conceived, particularly the idea that the Neanderthals might react to olfactory rather than visual stimuli and attack them despite their weird attire.

When the author is not philosophizing on the old, over-worked idea of atavistic reversion to savagery, as when he writes of Weismann as a dual personality (one, neoteric, scientific, and acculturated, the other, impetuous, daring, and primordial), he is both entertaining and mature. We know that the so-called average human being, like all other creatures, will, when released from the mores and legal restraints of modern society, tend to lose his rigid adherence to those regulations and become barbaric, or at least will more closely follow his own aggressive impulses, robbing, murdering, etc., but the idea of this action being linked with those of troglodytes and other prehistoric men has been too prevalently introduced in literature; it palls; it has become one of the unavoidable clichés.

Weismann is not new in literature; nor in real life. Analogies are not rare. In real life, we have Paul Gauguin abandoning civilized life for the simple, primitive life of Tahiti; we have Rimbaud the French Symbolist poet using his entire lifetime seeking for some supposedly untainted and inaccessible wilderness in which to spend his existence, dying without having found it.

In fiction, the examples of men searching for remote, non-mechanized lands in which to sojourn are too numerous to list. It is hard, none the less, to believe that a man as educated and scientifically developed as Weismann is supposed to be, would deliberately and preferably relinquish his intellectual background and enter a life of pure physical exertion, such as hunting wild animals, etc. A human personality does not so easily discard the mental routine of a lifetime. What the individual is when he attains maturation, he remains. Altering a whole way of life is not like choosing between two books or two sorts of food for a meal.

Weismann was a physician and scientist by choice; his personality was ramified and buttressed by that long-range choice. By whatever route he reached his adult personality, habit had reinforced it; he would be what he had trained himself to be, regardless of any random whim. A human being may appear erratic and changeable, but this is true only in minor, secondary things; the core of the personality, strengthened by long-time habit, does not change. I would make a conjecture; that sometime beyond the chronological limit of "Dian of the Lost Land" Weismann would regret his decision, once the romantic attachment to Dian had diminished. Apropos of personality, anyone interested might read the compilation of psychologic, psychiatric, sociologic, and anthropologic disquisitions, "Personality in Nature, Society and Culture," published by Alfred Knopf.

In many respects, from the viewpoint of good adventure writing, "Dian of the Lost Land" is better than Richard Tooker's "Day of the Brown Horde" or John Taine's "Before the Dawn." Marshall's descriptions of the prehistoric animals, such as the mammoth, is frightening without being sensational, as the descriptions of Burroughs are. The Finlay pictorials are the best I have seen by him since the war. But I do not see why he had to place floating spectres in Maun ig Mere, since there were none actually in the story. The readers know that the story is not supernatural and, I believe, would not mind if the pictures did not stress non-existent supernatural entities.

And on page 39, why is Weismann, who is supposed to be dressed in aviator's clothing, bare from the waist up?

Thanks for the next novel, M. P. Shiel's "The Purple Cloud"; I have been trying to find it for a long time.

JOSEPH W. DE CELIS.

P. O. Box 194,
Gramercy,
Louisiana.

She Praises "Dian"

Just let some of these guys howl if they want to, about the "end of civilization" and "lost peoples" stories! For my part, all you've been giving us lately is OK. But "Dian of the Lost Land"! It was super. Not just an ordinary lost-peoples yarn, written with plenty of adventure and in such a way that it sounds plausible, but one that really *has* something. Adventure, yes, and written plausibly enough too, *plus* a lot more—a poignant beauty one seldom sees in fiction of any kind, and the pathos and dignity of man's rise to the heights. Also, though some of the author's conclusions are somewhat against popular scientific opinions, he has evidently put in a lot of thought on the subject, apart from just the plot and the characterizations.

I promise I won't yell if you don't give me a single other story I like all this year, just on the strength of this *one!*

MRS. C. W. VALLETTE.

Declo, Ida.

Compliment to Lawrence

It finally had to come, and your April issue prompted it. Out of the silence, we speak. (Who was the guy that said the only persons having a right to use the singular "we" are royalty and people with tapeworms?)

Very, very enjoyable, a welcome change from rather endless world-destruction stories and a return to some of the old romanticism associated with the early classics. "Black Butterflies" was extremely entertaining. "Dian of the Lost Land" is a little disappointing, with its easily disproved fiction of the noble Cro-Magnons versus the bestial Neanderthals.

I'm still waiting for a Cro-Magnon-Neanderthal story which will use the findings of modern archeology and anthropology—it'd be entirely different from the conventional fictional picture of extreme contrast and violent war. For instance, the earliest Cro-Magnon artifacts (Aurignacian) are hardly much beyond the last Neanderthal (Mousterian), and it is to be doubted if war had yet been invented. . . . Oh, well, I still enjoyed "Dian." And the cover by Lawrence is superb, the first pin-up type I can remember really liking.

Everybody seems to be suggesting stories for you to run, so I'll name a few which haven't been mentioned yet—i.e., foreign stories and novels which are available in English translation. We'll skip Homer and the other early boys (though you could do a lot worse, and couldn't Finlay and Lawrence go to town on the Odyssey!) and get down to more modern brass tacks.

The most obvious is, of course, Karel Capek. Everybody knows "R.U.R.," but how many have heard of such other good science-fiction as "The Salamander War" or the superbly nightmarish "Krakatit"? Then Willy Ley has spoken so enthusiastically of Kurd Lasswitz's "*Auf Zwei Planeten*" that I'd really like to see it if a translation is available—or will I have to scrape the rust off my German?

From Norway we have, of course, "Peer Gynt," but it would hardly be suitable and the translation isn't much good anyway. But an excellent collection in English of some of Jonas Lie's fantasies exists, under the title "Weird Tales From Northern Seas"—and brethren, they *are* weird. Or you could get really high-falutin' and go to Denmark and the six magnificent volumes of Johannes V. Jensen's "The Long Journey," which tells, in a series of fantastic and beautiful "myths," the story of man from before the last ice age to the discovery of America. It won the Nobel Prize, incidentally. I might also mention Jensen's "The Fall of the King." Although officially a historical novel—and one of the best—it has a couple of chapters, "Inger" and "Grotte," based on very old ballads, which are fantastic—and ranking with the finest passages in world literature. But if I keep on raving about my literary idol, it would take a ream or so of paper.

Let's mention *en passant* the Swedish writer, Werner von Heidenstam, and his "*Folke Filbyter*". And while it's not strictly "adult" (whatever that may mean), I think Lagerlöf's charming "The Wonderful Adventures of Nils" would be a welcome change from blood and bones.

I'm told that there is much excellent science-fiction and fantasy in Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian, but wouldn't venture to say. Can some more cultured reader help us out?

But why go on? I haven't even scratched the surface.

Let's get out of the end-of-the-world rut, and restore F.F.M. to its rightful position of fantasy leadership.

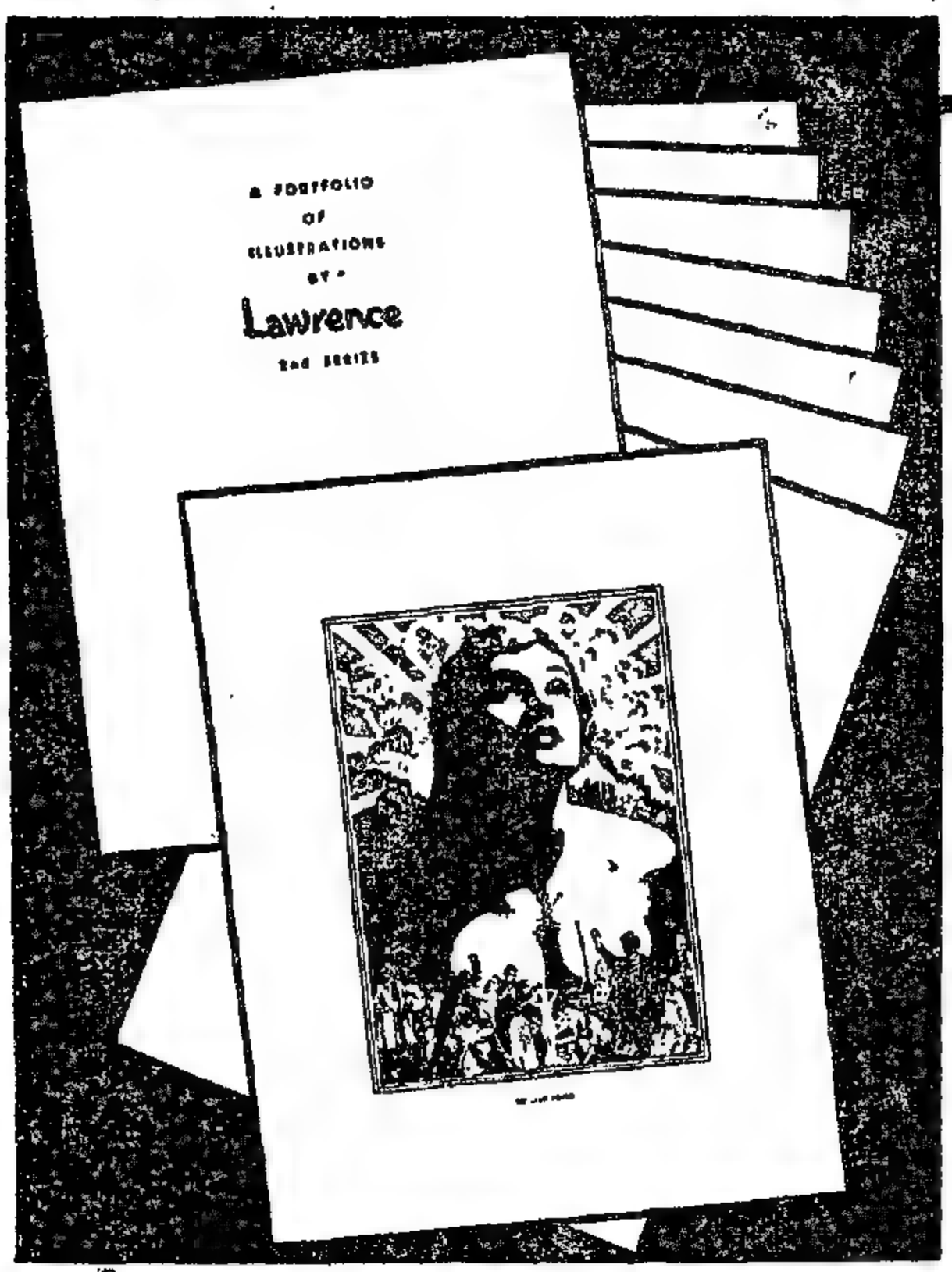
POUL ANDERSON.

3423 Aldrich Avenue N.,
Minneapolis 12,
Minn.

Appreciation of Finlay

I am one of those countless silent thousands who have been getting your magazine from the beginning. I should have said magazines, shouldn't I? Since 1939, I've been getting

(Continued on page 122)



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F. F. M. August

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Address .....

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F. F. M. August

(Continued from page 120)

F.F.M. and when it came out, F.N. Each month, I let myself in for the uncertainty of finding a copy—and truth to tell, I've been very successful.

Before I continue, may I say that enclosed you will find a check for $3.00 to cover a year's subscription to both F.N. and F.F.M. I'm growing tired of chasing each month for a copy.

I have read your readers' column all these years and suffered in silence the various criticisms hurled at you, as to choice of stories, choice of authors, choice of artists etc., etc. etc. They apparently disregard the fact that no story you will ever publish will meet with 100% approval from your readers, nor will your choice of artists for the various stories. Me—I'm perfectly contented to accept whatever you offer—knowing full well that it is the only way I'll ever get to read the greater majority of those same stories. Very few of F.N.'s stories ever came out in book form. I know. I've been reading and collecting scientifiction and fantasy for almost thirty years. I started when I was about ten. My conclusion is that, if they don't like the product, don't buy it. No one is twisting their respective arms. Plenty of others like myself will continue to be delighted to get your mags, no matter what author or story, in the scientifantasy field, you feature. For this, blessings on you, dear people.

I have only one comment to make. Tell Finlay to stick to the crosshatch and dot technique. He is so far and away superior to anyone else in that field, that comparison is absurd. You will note from my stationery heading that I am an artist myself, and so feel competent to offer an opinion, at least, on that one issue. I have, in fact, copied drawings of his for my own amusement, and because of their sheer beauty. Being human, Finlay will occasionally slip a bit from his high peak of quality. No one is capable of continued perfection—and his work comes as close to perfection in pen and ink work as I have ever seen. Emulation is the sincerest form of flattery, and I have tried to emulate the technique he uses, frankly with only fair success.

Now to the final part of my letter. I've frankly come to the conclusion that, while I will continue to get, read and enjoy your magazine, I shall collect only hard cover books after this. Thus I wish to get rid of my magazine supply. I have all the F.F.M.'s and F.N.'s through 1946 to now. I also have that oldie of yours, containing Cummings' "People of the Golden Atom," and "Through the Dragon Glass" by Merritt, put between hard covers. I also have in one binding the old *Amazing Stories* issues of "Master Mind of Mars" by Burroughs, "Moon Conquerors" by Romans, "Sunken Worlds" by Coblentz and "Interplanetary Bridges" by Anton. All four in one binding!

I have other hard cover books I wish to sell or trade also. You can send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the list.

I wish to acquire the following Merritt books, primarily by trade if possible—"Ship of Ishtar," "Burn, Witch, Burn!"—"Face in the Abyss," "Snake Mother," "Metal Monster"—and I mean books, not mags. I also want "Slan" by Van Vogt, and "World Underground" by S. Fowler Wright, and any or all of John Taine's books.

You will pardon the length of this letter, but it's the summation of ten years of being bottled up.

HENRY M. EICHNER.

2434 Altman St.,
Los Angeles 31, Calif.

E. B. Mason Admirer

Despite an ending which has been used at least sixteen thousand times—a conservative estimate—Mr. Mason's story easily managed to outstrip "Dian of the Lost Land" to carry off full honors this time around. A highly unusual tale indeed is "Black Butterflies," and an excellent example of the superiority of the old *Argosy* etc. yarns over those written today. E. B. Mason, along with those other illustrious writers of bygone days, seems to have had that which is now practically a lost art—originality (I choose to overlook the ending on the grounds that it might not have been so hackneyed in 1916).

The one redeeming feature of "Dian of the Lost Land" is that it takes up less than the usual one hundred-odd pages. The characters, with the possible exception of Dian herself, are familiar to the point of nausea. That last goes a long way toward describing the novel as a whole.

If this over-critical letter is printed, it will probably appear in the August issue, and, since that particular number marks the occasion of F.F.M.'s tenth birthday, let me offer my congratulations. The editor, publisher, and all connected with the magazine deserve the sincere appreciation of every lover of fantasy and science-fiction. It was the best in '39 and is still the best.

JAMES ELLIS.

604 10th St., S. W.,
Washington 4, D. C.

P. S.: To Weaver Wright, thanks for the info on William Tenn & "El Aspecto Humano." If anyone else is curious, Wm. Tenn—Tennessee Williams are related only in that they are both members of the human race.

Editor's Note: The first F.F.M. was Sept.-Oct., 1939.

Double Treat!

Bravo! The April issue of F.F.M. was a double treat. E. Marshall's "Dian of the Lost Land" was something different in the fantastic field; not only did the characters stand out, but the entire fantastic-historic value was skillfully woven and retained. It was a masterfully written work.

Mason's "Black Butterflies" was equally weird and exotic, featuring an entirely new theme to the usual jungle fantasy. What descriptive mood it held—what dreadful environment!

I'm still shivering!

Thanks,

MRS. BETTY PAPAVIANIS, JR.

832 Central,
Pittsburg, Calif.

Liked Marshall's Story

I've just finished reading "Dian of the Lost Land" by Edison Marshall. Enjoyed it very much. Your best recent story is "The Purple Sapphire" by Taine. I've been reading Science Fiction for a good many years.

I have a batch of back copies of various science fiction magazines that I would like to dispose of. Would like to get in touch with anybody who is interested. Best wishes!

HARRY F. MORTON.

1819 N. Humboldt Blvd.,
Chicago 47, Ill.

How About It, Readers?

In this letter (my first to your mag) I have some questions and some suggestions. But first and foremost: Thank you. Thank you for the covers by Lawrence and Finlay. Thank you for the inside illos by Finlay. Thank you for the stories by Merritt, Leinster, Robbins, and Taine. Thank you for your two readers' columns, TRV and WDYT?, where you print all the nice informative letters (that lets this one out). Amen.

Now for my questions. How many Tarzan stories did Edgar Rice Burroughs write? When did Edmond Hamilton write his first stf story?

Now come my suggestions. Reprint "Dark Worlds," "When the Earth Lived," "The Mask of Circe," and "Hollywood on the Moon" and the others of this series (can't recall their names), by Henry Kuttner. Anything by Weinbaum, Taine, Haggard, Burroughs, van Vogt, de Camp, Keller, Lovecraft, Heinlein, Hubbard, Jules Verne, and R. S. Shaver. Also "So Shall Ye Reap" and "The Despoilers" by Rog Phillips. Any of Edmond Hamilton's stories would be enjoyable too. How about some of Lee Francis' (Leroy Yerxa) earliest works?

I could keep this up 'til sundown tomorrow, but I have to get my lessons.

Will anyone who has old promags for sale please send me a price list? Thanks!

R. J. BANKS, JR.

111 South 15th St.,
Corsicana, Texas.

Mr. Moore's Poll

"Dian of the Lost Land" was one of the most entertaining stories that I have read in your mag. The author did not permit the story to lag as some of your stories have in the past. I rate it just a wee bit above "The Lion's Way," which was a honey of a story.

"Black Butterflies" must be rated second in this issue but was enjoyed by yours truly so much that I could hardly keep my eyes off the print. Is there a sequel to that little gem? If so, print it by all means!

Lawrence and Finlay are about average this issue, none of their illustrations are spectacular, but Finlay's illo on page 88 is in my opinion the best of the issue.

Here is the final listing on the poll I took on what stories should be printed in your mags F.F.M. and F.N. in their respective order.

Lad and the Lion—E. R. Burroughs, Green Fire—Taine, Fox Woman—Merritt, Heu-Heu; or, The Monster—Haggard, Last and First Men—Stapledon, The Moon Maid—E. R. Burroughs, The Iron Heel—London, Time Machine—Wells, Quest of Unknown Kadath—Lovecraft, Star Makers—Stapledon.

I hope you can make use of it. I also want to thank everybody that sent in their favorite stories to help this poll along.

Until the next issue. . . .

PAUL MOORE.

2266 Benson Dr.,
Dayton 6, Ohio.

P. S. The letter section was more like it this issue, the 12 pages you devoted to it was not too much.

Editor's Note: The sequel to "Black Butterflies" is "The Red Tree Frogs," an excellent novelette which will appear at a near future date.

"Dian" Very Good

"Black Butterflies" was a fairly good story. "Dian of the Lost Land" is very good. Would like to see his other three books published. The issue before that was terrible; two stories so poor that I could not read either of them.

For 34 years I have been wanting to re-read "The Moon Maiden" by Garrett P. Serviss, which appeared in *Argosy* in 1915. You can well imagine that a story that stays in your mind over a period of years like that must be something extra special. Any story that has ever appeared in book form you can always get dealers to trace for you; but that story, and, "Luckett of the Moon" which never did appear except in magazine form, there is no way of ever reading again.

Likewise 10 stories by Homer Eon Flint. Also, "Draft of Eternity" by Victor Rousseau. I would like to see the six books of Otis Adelbert Kline pulished. These can be found, but would cost about $24.00; which is quite different from $1.50. F.F.M. and F.N. together, certainly saves quite a lot of money, when you stop to consider what all those stories would have cost in book form. Aside from the fact that a considerable number of those books were never published in large enough quantities to be spread amongst all the readers of the two magazines.

There is no point, that I can see, to publishing Burroughs' stories. Most of them can be bought in $1.00 editions. I am specializing in first editions by Haggard, who is far above all the rest, in my opinion. He could really make his characters live. Although they are hard to find in 1st editions in this country, my correspondent in London is doing very well.

HAROLD F. KEATING.

7 Arnold St.,
Quincy 69, Mass.

A Splendid Issue!

I was most interested in your last novel, "Dian of the Lost Land," not so much as a story but as an interesting anthropological theory. As a story, "Dian" was not too good, for the conflict and action were sometimes weak and slow, and there was little fantasy. Some folks might

shrug it off as "just another cave man story." However, I was interested all the way through because of the constant attempts at keeping archeological evidence exact and fitting it into the historical pattern of the late Paleolithic. So many stories dealing with Egypt, Assyria, cave men, dinosaurs, and other ancient things tend to sacrifice scientific accuracy for lurid adventure. For me, inaccuracies destroy the effect.

At least Mr. Marshall attempted to preserve some of the scientific detail, but he has neglected some important facts. First, it is fairly well proven that the Cro Magnon or Magdalenian culture period continued on in altered form into the Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age). These people became the Azilians, a forest-dwelling, hunting and fishing people. In their turn, after thousands of years, the Azilians were driven out or massacred by an invasion from the East—that of agricultural people from the general Near Eastern region. It is known that agricultural invaders and hunting Azilians lived together and traded for some time before the Azilian culture disappears. Perhaps the hunters were destroyed by farmers who took over the hunting grounds and killed the wild life.

Also, as Mr. Marshall says, the glacial retreat forced the Azilians (Cro Magnons) to change their economy—but they did not retreat with the glaciers! They changed their economy to agree with the heavily forested environment. Anyway, any small band of Cro Magnon attempting to turn south toward Antarctica would be destroyed or assimilated by the North African Tardenoisian culture. Sea travel would also be improbable in small dugouts to the ice, past it, and to the "Lost Land". For, by the time the Cro Magnon were driven out (assimilated or destroyed), the antarctic glaciers were thick and impassable.

Another thing that annoys my sense of scientific accuracy is Mr. Marshall's constant etymologies. He quotes and translates many passages of "Cro Magnon speech" and identifies it with ancient Indo European, the root of all our modern Western languages. This is improbable, for the Cro Magnons were replaced by the first Indo European speaking peoples. They themselves probably had a completely different language base, which may even have survived in Etruscan, Pictish, or Basque. At any rate, it seems strange to show such obvious relationship between modern languages and this indescribably ancient root tongue. Even Weismann, a doctor, was able to catch the relationship between Cro Magnon and modern tongues. This is certainly fantasy!

However, I was pleased with your issue. The other story was good, and your illustrations were superb as usual. The cover is well done, and the inside illustrations surpass those of your competitors by far. I especially liked the one heading "Black Butterflies."

I hope we will soon see another such splendid issue. I am looking forward to "The Purple Cloud," although I have the book. I just want to see your illustrations!

PHILLIP BARKER.

5012 21st N. E.,
Seattle 5, Wash.

Will Sell Complete Sets

I have decided to clear out my entire collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy mags. I have read them all many times and now I'll give someone else a chance.

I have to offer: A complete file of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* to 1949. 8 issues are coverless but complete, rest all in good condition. Will sell only as a unit, no separate issues.

Also one large box containing: Most '46 and '47 issues of every science fiction and fantasy mag. on the market except F.F.M.;

Plus a few '44 and '45 issues, including the "I Remember Lemuria" *Amazing;* plus 7 copies of F.F.M. with "Moon Pool" removed; Spring '48 *Amazing Quarterly;* 5 pocket books, Weird and S. F.; several Fan. mags. The contents of this box originally cost over $25.00, and will make a fine trading collection for someone. Will sell only as a unit.

1948 issues of every mag. available—will sell separately for original price.

All sales C.O.D.

Best offers received within six weeks after publication of this letter will get the mags.

MRS. EARL BECKER.

11 N. German St.,
Mayville, Wis.

She Likes Science Fiction

Have been reading your wonderful magazine for some time now. My cousin, J. T. Oliver, loaned me my first copy, "The Undying Monster." It was so good, he was trying to get everyone to read it. Now I share his sentiments! I prefer the novels to short stories. I wish you would publish a science-fiction novel sometimes. Variety, you know. I like Finlay on the cover and Lawrence on the inside. If anyone is interested, I have a closet full of old STF and weird magazines and books. These aren't for sale. I want to trade them for books and mags.

MRS. ELMER SWANGER.

1025 14th St.,
Columbus, Ga.

About F.F.M.'s Following

You published my letter in the issue in which I stated I would send a free magazine to everyone answering. I have received over 300 letters so far.

I am answering every letter, and everyone gets a magazine—but I now have to stretch it out to fanzines and miscellaneous items. I am trying my best to answer every letter and get everything out. If I seem to be slow—fans, please wait. I never realized it would have such a great response. Best wishes again to F.F.M. and to my favorite artist.

Finlay Fan No. 1,
JACK ROBERTS.

69 Erie St.,
Tiffin, Ohio.

Finlay Fan No. 2

Being owner of a book and magazine store, I have ample time for reading—and—you

guessed it: I spend all my time reading Science-Fiction. Needless to say, I much prefer F.F.M. and F.N. to all others.

I have no complaints at all except to state that since Jack Roberts of Tiffin, Ohio, is Finlay Fan No. 1—I claim the distinction and honor of being No. 2. At least I would like to talk to him and others at the convention in Cincinnati this coming Labor Day.

Also—being in the business, I have hundreds of used back numbers of any and all Science and Fantasy Fiction that I will gladly sell for the original price of 25c or swap for others.

Keep up the good work.

Fantasy Forever—
RALPH V. FLEURETTE.

Krafft's Bookstore,
510 So. Washington Ave.,
Saginaw, Mich.

Won't Forget "Dian"

Marshall's "Dian of the Lost Land" was really good. I shall never forget this one. One unforgettable fantasy classic indeed.

"Black Butterflies" was readable. In fact the whole issue was good, backed up by nice interior illustrations.

Continue the good work and you'll have very little kick from me.

JAMES W. AYERS.

609 1st St.,
Attalla, Ala.

Complete Collections for Sale

I won't go into any lengthy discussion to tell you what a swell mag F.F.M. really is. Sufficient to say that I've been reading it from the very first issue and just recently extended my subscription for two years.

The main purpose of this letter is to let the fans know that I have a complete collection of both F.F.M. and F.N., all the way from Vol. 1 No. 1 to the latest issues that I would like to sell.

It's best offer takes, so come in, youse guys, let me know your bids and wants.

HENRY SYPNESKI.

9142 Isham St.,
Detroit 13, Mich.

Enjoys Every Page

I have been reading your *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* for a long time and have enjoyed every page of it tremendously.

I have just finished the June issue, 1948—better late than never.

The story I thought most interesting was "The Devil's Spoon."

I am strictly a fantastic reader.

May you carry on, giving us good yarns in 1949.

ALBERT MILNE.

9 Durham Ave., Salt River,
Cape Town, South Africa.

Like Meeting An Old Friend

Glad to see "The Purple Cloud" come up. I read the story years ago and it will be like meeting an old friend. It's good to see that a great variety of authors and stories are now appearing in F.F.M. A cycle of stories, no matter how good, is bound to become boring no matter how well written they are.

Leave out a page of letters and put in a permanent Editor's Page.

ED WOOD.

31 N. Aberdeen St.,
Chicago 7, Ill.

Wants Merritt Items

I haven't been reading your magazine for so long. Naturally, I'm an Abe Merritt fan from way back. I've been looking for his "Ship of Ishtar," "Moon Pool" and "Conquest of the Moon Pool" for years, but they always seem to elude me.

Lately, I read with chagrin that you reprinted some of them during the past year some time. So, I determined to write once more to see if I can secure them from some kind-hearted pitying subscriber. I am willing to buy or trade.

I have a few unusual items to trade. "Tales of Fear and Trembling" edited by A. Hitchcock, "The Master Mind of Mars" by Edgar Rice Burroughs, "Face in the Abyss" and "People of the Pit" by A. Merritt, and, not least, "The Ultra-Elixir of Youth" by A. Hyatt Verrill.

That last mentioned tale is a fascinating horror story, by the way. I defy anyone to put it down till the awful end is reached. It concerns a group of men who experiment till they discover an elixir which rejuvenates. Unfortunately, however, they all imbibe before all its properties are explored. Can you guess what happens?

Well, anyone wishing to make me an offer can contact me at address below.

Be seeing ya,

NICK VARANO.

318 Prospect,
Meadville, Pa.

E.R.B. Books for Sale

I have been an avid reader of your magazine for quite a while. I have been reading magazines of the Science Fiction type since I was a kid, but this is the first time I have ever written to any magazine. I have just finished reading the April issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, and I think you have one of the best fantasy magazines being published today. The story, "Dian of the Lost Land," especially appealed to me, for I have always read everything of this type which I could get my hands on.

I just wish to say that I hope you will have many more stories like it in the future issues of your magazines. I notice that some of the fans who write to you are always talking about back issues, and seem to be anxious to get hold of all the issues of fantasy magazines which they can. Well, I have eleven copies of the "Tarzan" series by Edgar Rice Burroughs, all cloth bound, published by Grossett and Dunlap.

These books can be had for $3.00 per copy. Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope for the list.

I also have a cloth bound edition of "The

Lost World" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Anyone who wants it can make me an offer.

I also have about 150 copies of Science Fiction magazines including F.F.M., F. N., *Amazing*, F.A., *Startling*, T.W.S. and others which I will either sell or trade if anyone is interested. Please keep up the present high standards of your magazine and you will be guaranteed one customer, namely me.

W. C. FRANKLIN.

Box 908,
Concord, N. C.

"Dwellers in the Mirage" Asked For

Of late, in your magazine, I notice a tendency to publish stories which are neither famous, fantastic nor mystery, to wit "Nordenholt's Million." Also, I might point out that although the jungle environment in a story is interesting, it does not seem so interesting that one would like to see a whole issue devoted to it. Fantasy does not consist in hyperdevotion to the prosaic, as exemplified in the first story I mentioned, but rather in presenting an environment alien to the reader which the environment of "NM" was not: or by altering a familiar environment in such a way as to intrude alien elements into it which "NM" didn't do. (This second kind is perhaps the most effective fantasy.) In F.N. I look forward to seeing Merritt's "Dwellers in the Mirage." And in F.F.M., H. P. L.'s "Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath" Also in F.N. "The Blind Spot" stories.

F. A. GILES.

190 Cleveland St.,
Toronto, Ont., Canada.

No Complaints

You must get awfully tired of receiving complaints all the time. One guy complains about the covers and inside illustrations, another guy yaps about the stories, and then there is the third character who complains about the lightly clad female on the cover.

So get set for a shock, I haven't a complaint in the world.

Your covers are fine (pardon me, your lightly clad females are fine, yum! yum!) your stories are all swell and your inside illustrations are great.

Wait a minute, you say, there's a catch here some place. Well, to be truthful, there is. As you recall, I said your stories were swell, and they were all all right, but you could improve upon them. If you would allow me to suggest a couple of books—or one of them you put out in 1941—the name of it is "The Metal Monster" by A. Merritt, the past master at fantasy. The other is "The Ancient Allan" by H. Rider Haggard. I already have a copy of both of these but they are pretty well shot. Also I am sure there are many people who have never seen either of these stories.

Keep up the good work and don't let the stories slip down into mere boring things to pass the time with.

RAY RELAFORD.

4433 Euclid,
Kansas City, Mo.

Anyone Interested?

From what I've seen, no one seems to be running a lending library in science fiction and fantasy magazines and, even though my collection extends only back to about May 1945, I think there would be quite a few newer fans who would like it if somebody started something like that.

I've figured out a method by which I wouldn't lose any magazines, and the borrowers wouldn't lose any money, except enough to pay postage on my side and a small (about 25¢) fee to replace magazines that get worn out.

I can't see anything wrong with the idea, and, as I said before, I think there would be a good many fans who would like it.

Anyone interested please write me and I'll give full information. Thank you.

FREDERICK MCLEAN.

Box 371,
Anacortes, Wash.

He Wants Your Preferences

According to my calculations this letter (?) will be miserably received by all true fantasy fans. Skipping all my conventional tripe, however, I'll spread out my misshaped ideas on the April issue of F.F.M.

To begin with, "Dian of the Lost Land" by Edison Marshall was splendidly approached in its lost race idea. Out of every conceivable plot for fantasy, I enjoy the primitive man stuff the best.

Not to spend too much time on one story, I'll simply state that it was clear, precise, and the thoughts of the plot were well connected. Pleasant ending, also. More of the same type of story in the future.

Considering the date in which it was published (1916), "Black Butterflies" by Elmer Brown Mason was remarkably well written. Held my interest, and it was unusual in its ideas.

On the whole, this month's issue appealed to me. How about more stories on the level of this month?

Pictures by Finlay, though well drawn, were out of proportion with the stories.

Now that the review of this month's stories is in print, I'll take up another subject dealing with F.F.M.'s stories.

I've noticed in recent issues of F.N. and F.F.M. that some of you reader folks have been grinding in the fact of the supernatural. Now, since I know that all of us have various tastes in literature, it stands to reason that one type of story should be good to one person and turn the stomach of another.

Looking through all your letters, I have come to the conclusion that there are more fantasy and science-fiction fans than supernatural fans. At this point, I had better state that I am first and foremost a supernatural fan. While I enjoy fantasy and science fiction yarns tremendously, I doubt if I will ever get from them the wonderful thrill that a powerful supernatural story gives me.

Here is what I am leading to. Not that this will prove or establish anything definite, but,

In the next issue of F.F.M., would each of you please try to state what type of story you prefer? Here is the simple procedure. Put down one of these numbers according to your preference.

1. For all types of supernatural stories, ghosts, demons, witches, vampires, werewolves.
2. For all types of fantasy stories, ranging from world destruction to lost worlds, etc.
3. For all science-fiction stories, dealing with development of high science, etc.

Thank you (that's a gun in your ribs, son) just put down one of the numbers—simple?

Another subject that was recently brought up was the case of the mound of increasing praise of that so-called classic, "Dracula". I think I may safely say that it was one of the hardest tasks of my reading career to struggle through that jungle of slush and nonsense. Furthermore (and to add a few choice adjectives) it was tedious, lifeless, dismal, fatiguing, uninteresting —I guess that's enough to show my feelings on the matter. (Not necessarily anyone else's.)

I will admit, though, that from Part I-IV there is an excellent building up of high horror. I think everyone will heartily agree on this. From Part IV on down, the plot slowly but surely disintegrates, until it becomes a task to keep your mind on the plot.

In closing my second debut, I am jotting down those desirable items I would like to see printed in F.F.M.:

"The Ghost Pirates", and "The Night Land" by William Hope Hodgson, "The Lord of the Sea" by M. P. Shiel, "The Dreams in the Witch-House" by H. P. Lovecraft, "The Trod" by Algernon Blackwood, "On the Borderland" by T. Britten Austin, "The Space Raiders" by Barrington Beverley, and ". . . . . Lo!" by Charles Fort.

I never could end letters in a dignified fashion, so I'll just say, "so long till next month."

BING CLARKE.

Stamford, Conn.

Rates Stories

I have been perusing my file of F.F.M. and decided to pick the ten best novels since the policy change. Here they are in order of merit. "The Star Rover"—Jack London; "The Devil's Spoon"—Du Bois—had excellent humor and fine characterization; "The Purple Sapphire"—Taine; "The Scarlet Plague"—London; "Allan and the Ice-Gods"—Haggard; "The Greatest Adventure"—Taine; "The Ancient Allan"—Haggard; "The Iron Star"—Taine; "The Ark of Fire"—Hawkins; "The 25th Hour"—Best.

Out of the shorts, I couldn't find 10 I liked. In order of merit, I liked: "Daemon"; "Prisoner of Time"; "The Human Angle"; "The Shadow and the Flash"; "The Wendigo"; "The Willows".

Now I'll follow the techniques of others and propose my selections for future issues. I'll list them in order of preference. "Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath"—H. P. L.; "Gold Tooth"—John Taine; "Green Fire"—John Taine; "Seeds of Life"—John Taine; "Cosmic Gods"—John Taine; "White Lily"—John Taine; "Werewoman"—C. L. Moore; "The Mad Brain"—

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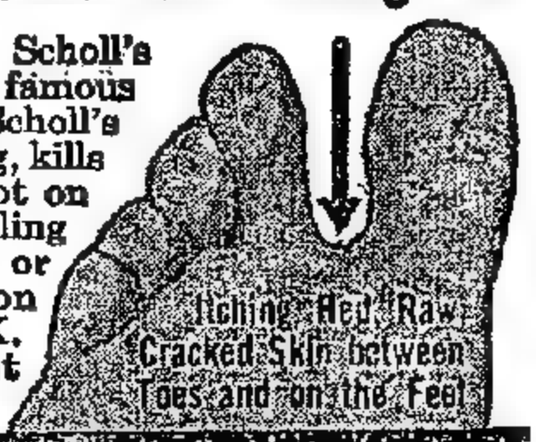

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Stanley Weinbaum; "King Kong"—Delos W Lovelace; "Gladiator"—Phillip Wylie; "The Incomplete Enchanter"—De Camp.

I have F.F.M. duplicates to trade and other items. Please send stamped, self-addressed envelope for lists.

DON LOCKMAN.

502 E. Northlake,
Seattle 5, Wash.

"Moon Pool" the Favorite

Have just finished reading "Dian of the Lost Land". Would like to say it is a very good story. Edison Marshall stories are always swell reading anyway. "Black Butterflies" was very interesting, too. There is quite a contrast between Dian and Kratas. I would like to see a butterfly as big as one of the black ones, but not so bloodthirsty. Have never read the "Purple Cloud" so am looking forward to the next issue. When are we going to have another Haggard? I really don't know which one I would like to read the most. "Ayesha" is of course the most fantastic, also the best, but as I have a copy I would rather be selfish and hope you print some other one. "Allan and the Holy Flower" is good reading. So is "Queen of the Dawn". Would also like to read "Allan Quatermain". How about something really fantastic like Lovecraft for a change? Would still like to read "Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath". I don't think anyone could ever write such eerie awe inspiring, shivery stories as his.

Have been enjoying *Fantastic Novels* but hope they do not print any more Merritt stories that were already printed in F.F.M. I now have four copies of the "Conquest of the Moon Pool" and that should be enough to last me the rest of my life because it is still my favorite fantasy and I read it over again at least every six months.

Are there any other fantasies by Chambers beside "The King in Yellow"? Have read lots of his books but never any other fantasies. Please, do not print any more stories like "Nordenholt's Million". It is not worth reading a second time. "The Lion's Way" was fairly good but of course, as everyone says, too much like "Tarzan". "Angel Island" was quite fantastic. I already had a copy of "The Scarlet Plague". That is too much of a come down for the human race anyway.

P. H. MALONE.

3502 Union St.,
Eureka, Calif.

Wants Letters

This is my first letter, but I hope it will not be my last. I just finished the February issue of F.F.M. and in it was one story that far exceeded all of my expectations. "Angel Island" was one of the most beautiful pieces of writing I have ever had the pleasure of reading. Gillmore wrote with such flowing style that it seemed she was painting a story instead of writing one. As you have probably figured out I went overboard for the story, but in my opinion it was something to go overboard for. I still

can't see why it wasn't used for the cover illustration. As for "The Scarlet Plague", it was fair, but it should have never been published in this issue. It was so overshadowed by "Angel Island" that it seemed to be below F.F.M.'s usual standard. It was well written, but it couldn't compare.

That's all the comments I have to make except to say that you have a swell mag. here and keep up the good work.

RCT. ROBERT L. FUSFIELD.

RA-19347415,
9600 TSU-STR Co. 7,
Camp Gordon, Ga.

P.S.: If there are any stf. fans that would like to correspond with an eighteen-year-old soldier, tell them to come on. I'll take them on one and all.

Offer

Perhaps some of your newer readers, who have not had much chance to collect fantasy fiction, would be interested in some of the following items with which I must regretfully part.

F.F.M.—December 1942 (The Golden City) through October 1948 (The Lion's Way).

Weird Tales—July 1943 through January 1949.

Also several books including "Out of Space and Time" by C. A. Smith, "The Time Stream" by John Taine, "Slan" by A. E. van Vogt, "Jumbee" by H. S. Whitehead, "The Lurker at the Threshold" by Lovecraft and Derleth, and several others in good condition. The best offer takes.

GEORGE RICHARDSON.

73 Hersey St.,
Hingham, Mass.

Likes Monster and Vampire Yarns

This is to advise your readers that I have for trade one copy of "Creeps by Night", an anthology edited by Dashiel Hammett, and one copy of "And the Darkness Falls", an anthology edited by Boris Karloff. They do not sell *Weird Tales* at any place here in town so I wish to trade the two above-mentioned books for 16 issues of *Weird Tales* magazine. Any issues for 1945, 1946, 1947 or 1948, with the exception of the March, 1947 issue, will be acceptable. The two books contain stories by H. P. Lovecraft, John Collier, Donald Wandrei, S. Fowler Wright, Frank Long, Algernon Blackwood, William Irish, Henry Wakefield and many others.

I have been a reader of your magazine for the last two or three years. I wish you would print more stories like "Island of Dr. Moreau", "The Undying Monster" and the "Allan Quatermain" stories and less like "Angel Island", "The Forbidden Garden" and "Nordenholt's Million". I like stories about monsters and vampires.

WALTER CRANFORD.

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My main purpose in writing you this letter is to recommend a writer sadly absent from your pages. As one of the forerunners of the current modern trend in Weird and Fantasy writing he is worthy of presentation in the hallowed pages of F.F.M. I would like to suggest the following four stories as his best, though I have never failed to be fascinated by any of his tales. "Bird of Prey" is a fine weird tale with a wonderful climax; "The Devil, George and Rosie" is a delightfully whimsical Fantasy; "Green Thoughts" is a tale of body transformation, while "Evening Primrose" is an unclassifiable gem, whose like one all too seldom runs across. By now I'm sure you know that it is John Collier I recommend.

May I also recommend the Oriental Fantasies of Frank Owen; more of John Tain e.g. "Green Fire", "Gold Tooth", and "The Time Stream"; "World Below" by S. F. Wright; anything by Stapledon, Haggard and Mundy.

With your indulgence may I inform your readers that I am seeking books by all the above authors and have many fine books and magazines to trade?

Thanks for a continually most enjoyable magazine.

JAMES M. PERRIN.

381-3 East 151 St.,
Bronx 55, N. Y.

Editor's Note: Collier and Owen have sold most of their stories to magazines, I believe.

Wanted

1. The usual orchids to F.F.M. and F.N., a pair of consistently fine magazines of especial benefit to younger fans, to whom the "classics" are legendary.

2. The usual nomination of favorites. I like Merritt, Taine, Haggard and S.F. in general. Your letter column is also good, especially in that it serves the added purpose of a "trade journal" in fantastic literature.

3. This last was a build-up for the following: I am the proud possessor of an extra copy of the famed, unobtainable last installment of Smith's "Galactic Patrol" (A.S.F. Feb. '38). The magazine is in good shape, but it has a "center" section (p.p. 133-156) missing: half a novelette and a short story, to be exact. Aside from this it's a good buy—the famous "Mutant" cover (Sun as seen from Mercury, by Brown); "The Fatal Quadrant". "The Degenerates", "Wayward World", "Anachronistic Optics", "Mercurian Adventure", articles by Willy Ley and Herbert C. McKay, and—last, but far from least—the conclusion (part VI) of "Galactic Patrol". All complete.

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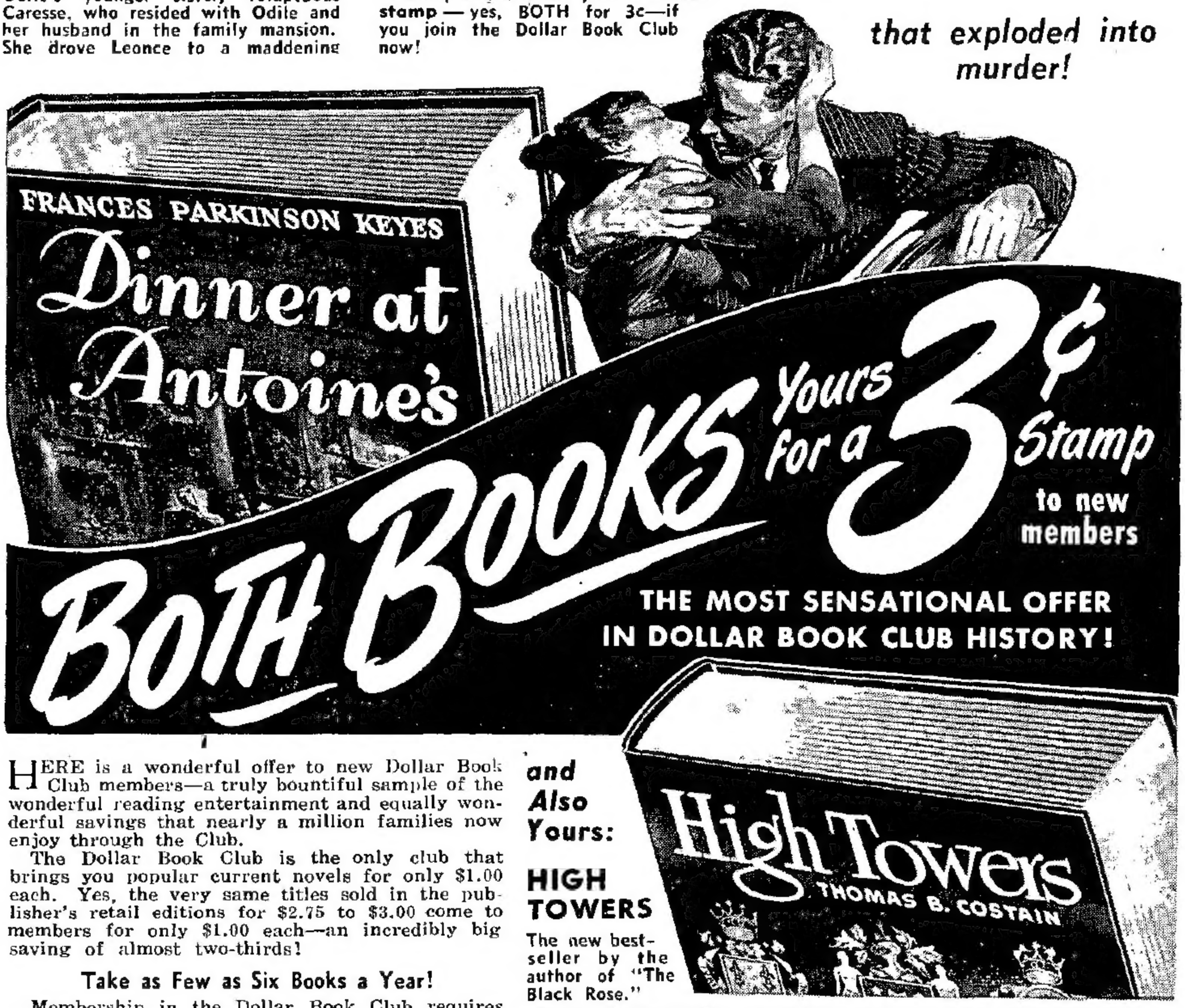

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